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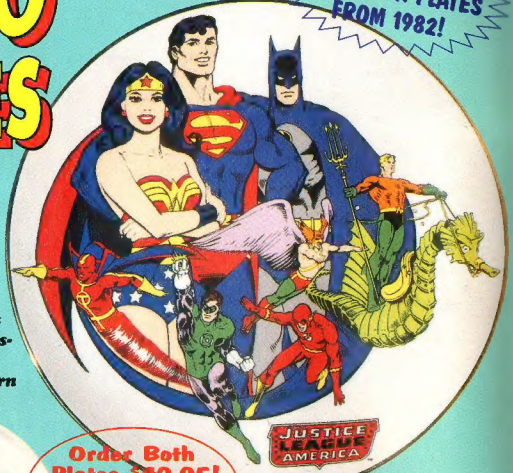

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COMICS Scene

On the Comics Scene

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Everyone remembering her now knows the name.

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Art: Jim Calafiore/Rodney Ramos/Colors: Eric Lusk

Armorines: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Voyager Communications Inc.

Art: Mike Mignola/Copyright 1991
Universal City Studios/Courtesy Topps

Recommended for all mature readers

Sin Art: By & Copyright 1992 Jason Stephens

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ANIMATION SCENE

Renewed Toons

'Tis the Renewal Season: Springtime is when networks shape their fall schedules, weeding out the least-watched shows and considering pitches for the latest fad-driven properties. The smash hits—such as *X-Men* and *Sonic the Hedgehog*—are usually renewed early, and with good reason:

"The more time you have to produce an animated series, the better it's going to turn out," says Antran Manoogian, president of ASIFA-Hollywood and associate producer of ABC's *Sonic*.

"It's usually a month or a month-and-a-half after the season begins that the networks look for material for the upcoming year. Even though a show is doing well, they want to have the time to consider everything. That's why they'll wait until NAPTE, the television convention, just to see what the other programming is, to give them an idea what to compete with."

As of March 1, the following series have been given early go-aheads:

Addams Family/Hanna-Barbera/ABC: The network wants eight more episodes for the third season.

Batman/Warner Bros./Fox: A late pickup by Fox has delayed the premiere of second-season episodes from 1993 to 1994. Five will air in May: "Trial," "House & Garden," "Avatar," "Sideshow" and "A Bullet for Bullock." The remaining 15 will be shown on Saturday mornings this fall, five of which may be further delayed until 1995. The Saturday morning episodes will be trimmed by a minute, with a new main title to be called *The Adventures of Batman & Robin*, in which Fox wants more emphasis on Robin to lure younger viewers. Video sales of the feature *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm* (due out in May) will determine further film adventures.

Bobby's World/Film Roman/Alevy Productions/Fox: Thirteen fifth season episodes bring the total to 60 adventures of little Bobby Generic, voiced by Howie Mandel. This season, Bobby has his tonsils removed, Dr. Demento makes an appearance and Mom finds a job after Dad loses his.

Cro/Film Roman/Childrens' Television Workshop/ABC: Eight new second season segments have been commissioned, with an option for more.

Disney's The Little Mermaid/Disney TV/CBS: Eight new episodes for the third season. Scuttle the seagull will appear, though the voice will not by Buddy Hackett because "he's too expensive." Ariel's hearing-impaired friend Gabriella may also return. Sebastian's parents visit Atlantica believing he is the king. In another episode, Sebastian befriends a "Tim Burton-ish" boy named Daniel, who's in league with a scientist who experiments on crabs.

Double Dragon/DIC/Synd: Thirteen new episodes for the second season, a total of 26 so far for weekend syndication. A daily strip is planned for 1995-1996.

***The Addams Family* will continue housekeeping for eight more episodes.**

Addams Art: Copyright 1992 Paramount Pictures

Droopy: Master Detective/Hanna-Barbera/Fox: Thirteen episodes, second season.

DuckDaze/Disney TV/Synd: Thirty-nine episodes in preparation for the Disney Afternoon, 1995, featuring Donald Duck and his nephews. Toby Shelton and Kevin Hopps are the producers; story editors are Gary Sperlin, Doug Langdale, Karl Geurs and Jymn Magon.

Exosquad / Universal / Syndicated: After the first 13 episodes, the solar system is overrun with NeoSapiens, much of humanity is enslaved and the Exofleet will spend 39 episodes "Reclaiming the Solar System," as the series expands to daily stripping this September. At least one major cast member will die. The third season wraps up the saga in 1995, as the heroes battle "A New Threat." Presumably, this threat will unite Homo Sapiens and Neos. Whatever happens, executive producer Will Meugniot promises "an interesting ending."

Monster Force, a new Universal series, will take over *Exosquad*'s weekly time slot for an initial 13 episodes. The Monster Force teams Universal's famous monsters—the Mummy, the Wolf Man, Dracula, Frankenstein's Monster—with superheroes to battle the bad guys.

Garfield & Friends/Film Roman/Lee Mendelson/United Feature Syndicate Inc./CBS: Eight half-hours have already been recorded as of mid-January, and more may be commissioned for the show's seventh season. So far, the prolific Mark Evanier has written 113 *U.S. Acres* and 226 *Garfield* shorts "which is a *lot* of lasagna jokes," he quips. Guest voices include Victoria Jackson, Imogene Coca, Harvey Korman and Rick Ducommun. Kevin Meaney is a new *U.S. Acres* character: Aloysius, an obnoxious pig. Don Messick reprises a bird named Ludlow, and Stan Freberg plays a pink dinosaur, who may resemble a certain omnipresent purple dino.

Hurricanes/DIC/Synd: Renewed for overseas syndication. No USA distributor yet.

Madeline/DIC/Family Channel: Renewed with 20 new episodes.

Mighty Max/Film Roman/Bluebird (UK) and Canal + D.A./Synd: Twenty-seven second season episodes as the show expands to daily broadcast this fall. It opens with a two-parter

Garfield: Copyright 1978 United Features Syndicate, Inc.

There will be new *Garfield* capers. You can make book on it.

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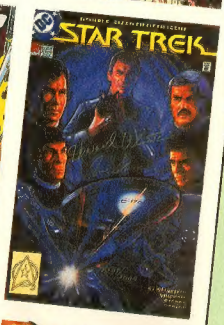

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by Alan Reed as Fred and Mel Blanc as Barney, and Bea Benaderet replaced Foray as Betty.

Last summer, the studio was looking for the original 35mm opening and closing sequences of *The Flintstones*, used during the series' first season, which is completely different from the familiar "Meet the Flintstones" opening/closing used in the show today. Searchers not only found the original print, but other rare clips, regional commercials—and the print of *The Flagstones*.

After 30 years, it will finally be shown to the public. Tune in to the Cartoon Network, Saturday, May 7 at 8 p.m. EST.

Something *Wicked* Your Way Comes: Streamline Pictures' latest release is *Wicked City* (a.k.a. *Supernatural Beast City*, 1987), a "psycho-sexual thriller" from the director of *Lensman*, Yoshiaki Kawajiri, adapted into English by Carl Macek. This isn't kid stuff, folks. The film abounds with graphic sex, violence and horror in the extreme, as it deals with a fragile union between a parallel dimension of demons and the world of man. Definitely not recommended for children, the squeamish and the easily offended, *Wicked City* is currently circulating in limited-release. See the art published last issue.

***Thumbelina* Grows a Longer Title**: According to the movie poster, it's now *Hans Christian Andersen's Thumbelina*. The $27 million fairy tale from Don Bluth is scheduled for Easter release by Warner Bros. The question is, will Warners give it stronger publicity and marketing support than it did with *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm*?

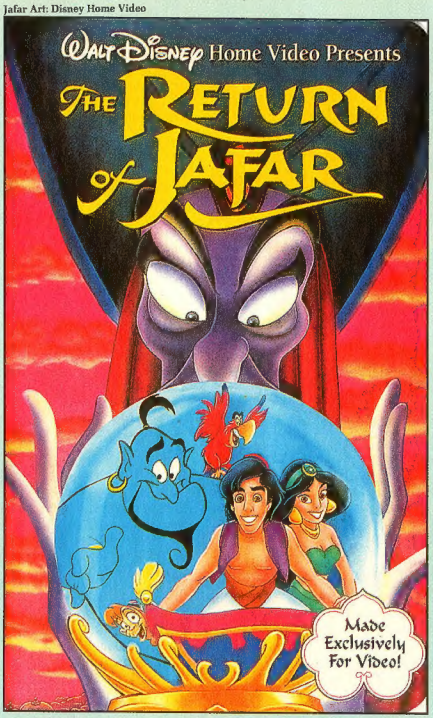
Absent from the poster's credits is Carol Lynn Pearson, writer of the original screenplay. Don Bluth is given sole script credit on the poster.

Thumbelina is voiced by Jodi Benson, the voice of Ariel, Disney's Little Mermaid, and Tula the ecomancer in Hanna-Barbera's *Pirates of Dark Water*. For a live-action reference, Bluth's animators used Angeline Ball, a singer in the cinematic Irish rock band, The Commitments.

Bluth discussed his productions at length in CS #31. His Irish studio is currently completing *The Pebble and the Penguin* for Christmas '94, and entering pre-production on *Rapunzel* and *The Toy Maker*.

Beauty & the Beast premieres on The Disney Channel May 15 during the *Magical World of Disney*. Disney's 30th animated feature film is the first to be Oscar-nominated for Best Picture, and it's a two-time Oscar winner for Best Original Score and Song ("Beauty and the Beast"), three-time Golden Globe winner for Best Musical or Comedy, Best Original Score and Best Original Song, and five-time Grammy winner. The film has grossed more than $196 million domestically and $203 million internationally, and video sales have topped 20 million units. There's also a stage musical version of *Beauty & the Beast* now on Broadway.

Jafar Art: Disney Home Video



It's Disney's first direct-to-home-video adventure, the sequel to *Aladdin*, *The Return of Jafar*. Look for it in May.

When You Wish Upon a Lamp: As of February, with *Aladdin* raking in $217 million at the U.S. box office, $258 million in foreign grosses and selling 21 million units and counting in home video, it's not surprising that Disney wants to mine the mother lode for more gold.

Disney TV Animation has gotten into the act, producing 65 episodes for the Disney Afternoon, plus 13 to air on CBS on Saturday mornings this fall. Two episodes previewed on The Disney Channel in February.

And, coming May 20, is the release of a new, feature-length sequel, not to theaters but directly to home video: *Aladdin: The Return of Jafar* ($22.99 retail). Slightly over an hour in length, the story occurs about four hours after the first movie. Aladdin and Jasmine *do not* get married. They remain engaged throughout the series, though they may wed in a third movie. Both aren't ready to settle down in the Palace (especially with its rules and regulations), so off they go on "a whole new world" of adventure.

All of the voices from the *Aladdin* movie carry over to *Jafar* except for the Genie. It's not Robin Williams, but Dan Castellaneta, otherwise known as Homer J. Simpson. Genie's powers have been diminished, though he can still transform into a variety of people—including Homer. Castellaneta also voices a villainous ice elemental, Frihjeed.

Obnoxious parrot Iago (Gilbert Gottfried) now hangs out with Aladdin (Scott Weinger), while monkey Abu (Frank Welker) remains totally unredeemed; the two animals torture each other and steal things that get our heroes in trouble.

As for Jafar (Jonathan Freeman), this video appearance will be his last. According to supervising producer Tad Stones, "We kill him off until another story editor takes over. I just felt that Jafar was too good of a Disney villain to start bringing him back daily so that he starts turning into Gargamel.

"We took every single element out of that feature, analyzed it and made up our own rules based on scenes," Stones reports. "We just took that one scene where Jasmine (Linda Larkin) leaps across the alley as a sign of a strong personality. Several episodes feature her and there may be a line of *Jasmine* videotapes. Jasmine is actually a more popular character than Belle in *Beauty & the Beast*."

The Return of Jafar will see broadcast as a primetime TV special around Labor Day.

Disney's New Direct-to-Video Division: *The Return of Jafar* is the first of Disney's original video animation (OVA), joining the arena led by Hanna-Barbera with its *The Greatest Adventure: Stories from the Bible* and *Timeless Tales* line, Warner Bros. with *Tiny Toon Adventures: How We Spent Our Vacation* and *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm*, and Universal with its three *Land Before Time* OVAs.

These are low-budget by animated feature standards, but at $3 million apiece, the quality is better-than-TV-average, plus, the content is *not* affected by network censorship.

Depending on sales of *The Return of Jafar*, Disney could release one or more *Aladdin* sequels. The studio may also exploit its vast library of feature and TV characters, including *TaleSpin*, *Rescue Rangers*, *Winnie the Pooh*, *The Little Mermaid* and *The Jungle Book*, with wraparounds featuring Baloo. Not likely are videos starring *Gummi Bears* and *Bonkers*.

The video division is also considering spinoffs of upcoming Indian war stories before the arrival of Captain John Smith (in *Pocahontas*). However, a *Lion King* video may not be likely, due to its realistic animation approach.

Inquiring Minds Want to Know: In the sequel to Disney's *Aladdin*, the Genie is still wearing his bracelets. Why? Well, the Genie was asked the question, but the line was cut from the film: "Well, why are you still wearing shackles? You're free." To which the Genie replies, "These aren't shackles. Shackles are completely different." He adds, coyly, "These are a fashion statement."

—Bob Miller

Thumbelina Art: Copyright 1994 Don Bluth Ltd.

***Hans Christian Andersen's Thumbelina*—as animated by Don Bluth and company—is now in theaters. Jodi Benson, the voice of Andersen's heroine Ariel in Disney's *Little Mermaid*, voices Thumbelina.**

as Max accidentally frees evil Skullmaster. But Skullmaster is now at half-strength, and he must contend with a rival enemy, Lava Lord, who controls the Lava Beasts. New stories will deal with ancient myths, and Max will begin applying knowledge he has learned from earlier adventures. The final two episodes, #39 and #40, feature Max's climactic battle with Skullmaster. After that, a third season is possible. Gordon Bressack replaces Mark Zaslove as story editor, though Zaslove will script two new episodes.

Sonic the Hedgehog/DIC Enterprises/ABC: Eight new episodes for the second season, produced by Ron Myrick (formerly on *Addams Family*), replacing Dick Sebast.

SWAT Kats/Hanna-Barbera/Synd.: Thirteen second season episodes. MegaKat City's maverick defenders battle crime with a new TurboKat jet. A female Enforcer is introduced, and thankfully, we'll see less of Mayor Manx this season.

2 Stupid Dogs/Hanna-Barbera/Synd: Thirteen more half-hours will also feature *Super Secret Secret Squirrel*, *Hair Bear Bunch* and *Cattanooga Cats*.

The X-Men/Saban/Fox: Thirty-nine third season episodes are in production. The show will enter daily syndication this fall.

Movers & Shakers: Another good reason for committing early to a cartoon series is in case something unexpected happens—such as an earthquake. Most TV cartoon studios are concentrated in California's San Fernando Valley, and thus most were affected when on January 17, the area was rocked by a 6.7 earthquake, followed by several aftershocks.

Studios suffering significant damage included Hanna-Barbera (closed four days), Warner Bros. TV Animation, Kroyer Films, Film Roman, Disney TV Animation and Universal, causing delays of one to three weeks in production. Rich Entertainment, DIC Enterprises and Disney Feature Animation (opened the day after the quake but with few workers) suffered only minor damage. Fortunately, the artists could work out of their homes until the studios could clean up the mess.

Seriously damaged was the Valley Corporate Center that housed Film Roman. Water pipes broke, tiles fell and the air conditioning system was damaged. The worst damage occurred on the first and fourth floors, where crews on *The Simpsons* and *The Critic* (CS #41) worked, respectively; they had to be moved to other buildings. Once the air conditioning was repaired, Film Roman's Saturday morning crews returned to work on the second floor.

Kroyer Films (*FernGully*) also had to vacate its damaged Van Nuys facility. The generous Rocky Solotoff of Toon Makers, Inc. (formerly Hollywood Cartoons) sublet his studio to Kroyer. Coincidentally, the same building temporarily houses the *Simpsons* unit.

D'OH! Let's correct a couple of mistakes from CS #41. Disney is making *The Legend of Fa Mulan*, not *Fu Mulan*. *Tin Boy* is instead *Toy Story* (title still tentative). And Don (not Dan) Watson is a background stylist on *The Critic*, page 68. D'oh! Sorry.

Disney Duck Fans, Rejoice! Two dedicated fans, Christopher E. Barat and Joe Torcivia, have compiled a massive 250-page episode guide and bibliography to *DuckTales*, an abbreviated version of which appeared in *The Duckburg Times* #24/25. *The DuckTales Index* is available in three formats: 1) Complete (Seasons1-3 plus *DuckTales: The Movie*), $50; 2) "The World of *DuckTales*" and Season 1 only, $30; 3) Seasons 2 & 3, *DuckTales: The Movie* and Appendices only, $25.

Also available is *The Donald Duck Comic Book Index*. It covers story titles, character appearances and credits; 60 pages for $20; and *Disney's Adventures of the Gummi Bears: An Index to the Series*, 89 pages, $25.

These indices (sorry, no illustrations) are available *only* by mail order, with checks payable to Christopher E. Barat. Write to Launch Pad Publications, 5616 Crenshaw Road #934, Richmond, VA 23227. The authors plan indices to *Darkwing Duck*, plus *Uncle Scrooge* and *Mickey Mouse* comics.

Kurtz & Friends Unearth a *City*: On May 8, PBS has scheduled an hour-long special, *Roman City*, based on the book by David MacCulay. It features 22 minutes of animation by the Burbank-based independent, Kurtz & Friends. The studio, known for its eclectic styles in commercial animation, produced the title sequences for *Honey, I Blew Up the Kid*, *City Slickers* and its upcoming sequel.

MacCulay visits the ruins of Pompeii, Herculaneum and Ostia, and explains how the aqueducts worked, how the arches were made, and why the amphitheaters were round. The live action is interspersed with four acts of animation, following the story of Marcus, a Roman architect building a city in Gaul (modern-day France), and the problems he has with the native Celts and the rebellious Druids.

"It works really good with the characters, who are fully animated most of the time," supervising animator Cathy Jones says. "There's a lot of feature-quality work."

Legendary animator Corney Cole III designed and animated the Druid dream sequence, drawing on acetate with a ballpoint pen. He rendered the battle between the Romans and the Celts in a series of crosshatched drawings that dissolve to create a dreamlike quality. The sequence has backgrounds like parchment paper, with no color, which emphasizes the linework.

"The way the backgrounds are done is really interesting," Jones points out. "[Director/producer] Bob Kurtz didn't want typical animation backgrounds. He wanted the painterly quality to come through. Parts of the background are unfinished, which sounds odd, but when you see it on film, it really works."

Roman City is produced by Unicorn Projects, with live-action sequences produced by Larry Klein.

Space Ghost Delayed Again: Well, the premiere of *Space Ghost Coast-to-Coast* was pushed back to April 15. A *Gilligan's Island* tribute was slated with Bob Denver, Dawn Wells and Russell Johnson. Once stuck on a desert island, now they're lost in space!

Flagstones, Meet the Flagstones: Yes, that modern stone-age family used to have *another* name, until it was altered to avoid conflicting with the Flagstone family in Mort Walker's *Hi and Lois* comic strip. But before the name change, Hanna-Barbera produced a one-minute, 45-second test print about Fred and Wilma *Flag*stone, starring *Daws Butler* as Fred and Barney, and *June Foray* as Betty! Of course, Butler was ultimately replaced

Photo: Bob Miller

Film Roman's headquarters was severely damaged in the January 17 earthquake, causing some production delays and animator relocations.

WORD BALLOONS

Spelling Lessons

All right, all right, OK, OK, I already know. I knew before you ever saw it. Yes, yes. I *am* aware of it, OK?

Yes, we spelled Rob Liefeld's name wrong on the cover of COMICS SCENE #42.

It is, of course, Liefeld, not Liefield. And we know that. In fact, we *did* spell it correctly on the coverlines sheet given to Creative Director W.R. Mohalley (who designs the magazine's covers). Somewhere, though, in the process of creating that issue's coverline typefaces, the name got misspelled, pasted up and was never caught—until the very last minute after the cover was color-separated—by the (obviously) asleep-at-the-wheel editorial staff. And although we then *tried* to change it, timing was against us. It just couldn't be done—not if we wanted that issue to be on sale anytime in March.

What a crushing feeling—to find a mistake, to try to fix it, but to be, ultimately, unable to do so and to simply have to live with it.

Our apologies to Rob Liefeld.

Of course, I'm *annoyed* about all this. I don't particularly like errors creeping into the magazine and we do our best to keep them out. But they're wily devils with their own agendas and despite our best efforts, they keep getting in, surviving our rigorous proofreading process (each story is proofed by five to seven people, often including the article's writer, and later proofed again, during layout, by two or three folks). I have no doubt that there are a couple of especially cunning errors (typos, misspellings, minor errors of fact) that got by us this very issue, too.

That doesn't count all the errors—wrong character names, phonetically spelled-though-inaccurate words, etc.—that we *did* catch this time, putting them to death (and being really glad about it). And there are style things to be corrected as well.

Now, with a name like McDonnell, I am *especially* sensitive to misspelled names. For many long years, I've become accustomed to receiving mail and other things addressed to Dave McDonald, MacDonald, MacDonnell, McDonell, even McDonnel, and most strangely—thanks to the grafting of my first name to the Scotch-Irish last names of former COMICS SCENE Managing Editors Mike McAvennie and Maureen McTigue—Dave McAvennie (Mike's long-lost brother?) and Dave McTigue (Maureen's future nephew?).

Needless to say, the permutations of McAvennie (MacAvennie, McAvenny and the intriguing Mac Venny) and McTigue (Marine McTeague, greedily, was a special favorite) proved amusing. And Associate Editor Marc Bernardin is already used to being Mark Bernardin, the very noteworthy Mark Bernard or even Marco Bernardo.

The irony here is that all of *our* misspelled names have shown up on mail from the major comics companies, including the marketing department of Rob Liefeld's Extreme Studios (where Marc may be forever known as Mark Bernardin). It's still sorta funny (and also vaguely insulting) that people we've known for years don't know how to spell our names. And hey, to some people, this very magazine is either COMIC SCENE or COMIXSCENE.

Wait a minute, what's that? You mean that you *didn't notice* any errors on the cover of COMICS SCENE #42??!

Never mind.

—David McDonnell/Editor

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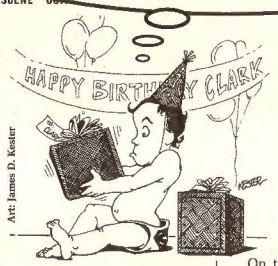
...From the network and one of the directors that almost destroyed Batman nearly 30 years ago comes *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*. In the immortal words of Beavis and Butt-head, "Heh heh...heh heh...this show sucks!" More than anything else, what I could not get over was how *dull* it was! There was *no* action...*no* adventure...*no* comedy...there wasn't even any camp until the last 30 minutes of the premiere episode! It was the worst type of drama: Talk and nothing but talk—with a minimal amount of suspense.

The more I think about it, the more the pilot reminds me of those horrid Marvel telefilms of the '70s and '80s. It's really sad and disappointing. *Superman III* was *far* more enjoyable and entertaining than *Lois and Clark*. Dare I say it—even later episodes of *Superboy* were more entertaining! *Lois and Clark* is a travesty that may attract baby boomers but will undoubtedly turn off everyone else, especially comic book readers under 30. Lex Luthor comes across as a bland copy of Ross Webster. The actor playing Perry White seems as if he's trying to do a Jackie Cooper imitation. Jimmy Olsen is horribly miscast with someone who looks as old as, if not older than, the actors playing Clark and Lois. The flying scenes (what little there were) were quite excellent and they *are* following the current comics closely, but it was just so *dull*! The one-and-a-half-hour telefilm seemed to drag on for five hours! This is the type of lame show that will end up on reruns on the Lifetime cable network.

I will say that Teri Hatcher is a big improvement over Margot Kidder (probably the only weak link in the feature films), but it's such a shame—an excellent, well-done show like *The Flash* gets cancelled, and a *boring* "drama" like *Lois and Clark* be-



comes a hit. Here's hoping *Lois and Clark* will be cancelled and Warner Bros. will cut a deal with Richard Donner, Christopher Reeve and Gene Hackman to do a new Superman feature film. I'm sorry, but this show sucks. (Hey, why am *I* sorry? Warners TV should be doing the apologizing!)

Lee Solomon
Sterling Hts, MI

...I've saved the whales, the elephants and the rainforest. Now, I'm directing my attention to another endangered species, the letters column. But I'm not sure that it's worth saving.

There are several reasons why the E-mailers should return to the letters columns. For one thing, E-mail messages don't provide the sense of accomplishment that comes from having a letter published in your favorite magazine. I still remember the time I had my first letter published. It was a thrill that those who "publish" their letters electronically can not experience. Also, the use of E-mail excludes all those people who don't have access to it, and I'll be so bold as to assume that this is the majority of comic book readers. A published letters column provides a forum for discussion accessible to all readers of the title in question. Ten years ago, I often read the letters column before checking out the story. Now and then, I actually caught a name I recognized. I've seen letters by Larry Niven (in *Conan*, I think) and Nichelle Nichols (in *Micronauts*). Some people contributed regularly. Whatever happened to The Mad Maple and Beppe Sabatini? And when a publisher prints the correspondent's *entire* address, who knows what may follow? I've made many friends through people who saw my address and decided to write to me. And where else can a 13-year-old-girl in South America write to a 30-year-old man in Europe and expect some common ground for conversation?

On the other hand, the decline of the letters column appears to be almost universal. These days, I've seen many letters pages with letters of this type: "Dear Editor, I think your books are cool. best wishes." Truly not inspiring material. And I know that even 13-year-old kids can be intelligent and articulate. At least *try* to explain why you think the book is cool, folks.

Gone are the days of controversy. Does anyone remember Tony Stark's slide into alcoholism? Or the lettercol discussions during that saga? Or the time *X-Men* readers tried to figure out the physics in Nightcrawler's teleporting power? Now, sadly, as storytelling appears to decline, discussions are usually limited to which character has the coolest hardware. A few editors try, but there's only so much they can do with the available material. In these days of "I think your books are cool" and "I would like to vent my pet gripe/get this letter printed by venting the editor's pet gripe" columns, I often skip the letters entirely. There's only so much mindless praise I can endure reading in one day. True, some are still controversial and worth reading, but those are becoming the minority. Probably because those people with something interesting to say log into the electronic mailboxes. Perhaps, though, it is because stories are often sadly lacking too. If there is no story, there is *nothing* to write about, except: "I think the pin-ups you publish in lieu of a story are cool."

Letter pages used to be fun, and they could be fun again. Right now, they aren't. Perhaps it is because contributors seek the instant pseudo-gratification of E-mail. Perhaps it is because there is no point to writing in. In which case, I vote for abandoning the letter columns. Right now, that wouldn't be much of a loss.

Jens H. Altmann
Address Withheld by Request

...It was a little surprising that the first issue of COMICS SCENE (#40) that found its way into my hands had an editorial about the absence of letters from readers. How strange, I thought. Although I am very selective in which comics I buy, I've always noticed at least a page or two of written comments from fans. So here I am.

While I bought CS #40 for the cover story on *Mask of the Phantasm*, I wound up reading the majority of the magazine. For me, that's the sign of well-written pieces, a couple of which may lead to my looking into the comics or characters featured. I'm not a vampire person, but *Rune* has an interesting appeal. A vampire dying from cancer? That kind of character twist caught my interest. The Batman/Green Lantern article was wild too! And while I read the Captain Marvel piece, he's too much of a goody-two-shoes for me.

The two articles on that issue *Batman: The Animated Movie* were great. I wasn't really a Batman fan before the series. The goofy '60s show and director Tim Burton's movies just didn't appeal to me. I would love to see more on the show in the future. How about a piece on the actors and actresses who give Batman such a headache? One thing

is for certain. I'll definitely buy future issues of COMICS SCENE, just as long as Beavis and Butt-head stay out of it.

K. August
P.O. Box 1003
Long Beach, NY 11561

...This is an open letter to Neue Constantin, Chris Columbus, J.C. Roberts and all those involved in the holding back of the release of *The Fantastic Four*—and probably the most civilized letter they are bound to receive on the subject.

I've no doubt that you have the legal right to do whatever you want to do with a film which is, after all, your property. But I'm equally sure that you don't have the moral right to take a movie which we, the fans, have been waiting patiently to see (whether to cheer or jeer it is irrelevant), and then snatch it away from us at the eleventh hour.

It occurs to me that if a new *Fantastic Four* movie is made, it will be a year, possibly two, before we see it. In that time, the original movie could be released to the big screen and then to video, making you a nice bit of cash which you could put towards the making of the new version, while at the same time whetting the public's appetite for the bigger things to come. Or don't you believe in appetizers?

I have one request on behalf of the millions of comics magazine readers who have come to know and love the cast of the original movie. If your plans for a bigger edition ever take off, please hire Alex Hyde-White, Rebecca Staab, Michael Bailey Smith, Jay Underwood, Joseph Culp and Kat Green (even Carl Ciarfalio, if a role can be found) again. By all accounts, these people, especially the four principals, clicked instantly; according to Staab, Hyde-White immediately became the leader, and she and Underwood became siblings just like that. You simply can't repeat that kind of serendipity!

As Clayton Moore has always been the Lone Ranger, even after new incarnations, Hyde-White, Staab, Underwood, and Smith & Ciarfalio *are* the Fantastic Four to us.

A great deal of work went into this picture (granted, not as much as would go into a more expensive one, but still a lot of talented people busted their butts), and it would be a shame, not to mention a loss of money, to hang it up now.

Please reconsider your decision gentlemen. Give us the original *Fantastic Four* movie, then when the second one is released down the line, let us decide for ourselves which one we prefer. It would be an interesting little experiment, don't you think?

Peter Heimsoth
1155 S. Church St.
Lombard, IL 60148

...I'm writing to express my gratitude to director Russell Mulcahy and all others involved in the making of the movie *The Shadow*. I have always thought that The Shadow was one of the more intriguing superheroes. I never understood why he didn't catch on more in recent years. Was it because he didn't have a skintight outfit with a huge, red "S" on the front? Who knows? But I'm very appreciative that he is getting his own movie. Maybe now he'll get the recognition he deserves. You never know, maybe down the road there will be little five- and six-year-olds running around playing with the *Shadow* action figure that their mother just purchased for them. Maybe *The Shadow* will be the next *Batman*. Congratulations to all for finally recognizing *The Shadow*'s greatness.

Art: W.C. Pope

And about the editorial in issue #40, your magazine *is* almost perfection, but you could put more in about upcoming superhero movies. Thanks again.

James Ferace
P.O. Box 125
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Expect Shadow *action figures from Kenner Toys this summer. As for superhero movies, some readers feel we cover them too much. What do you think?*

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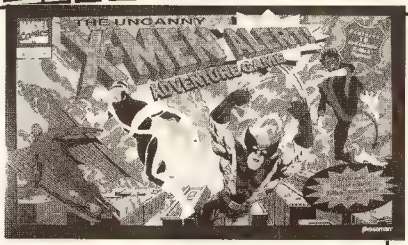

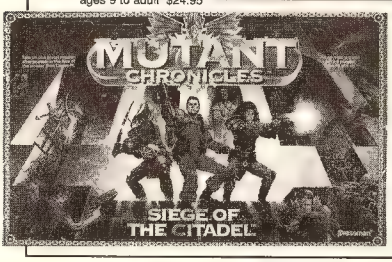

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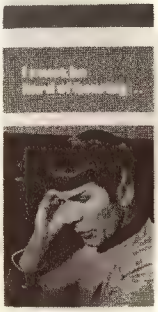

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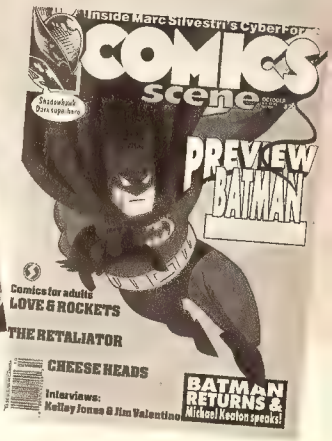

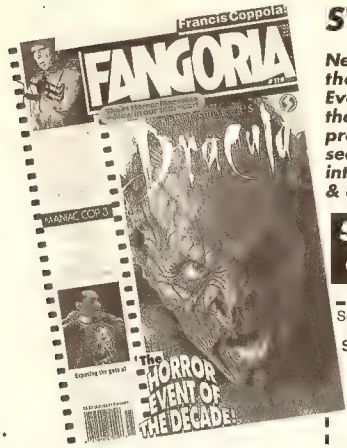

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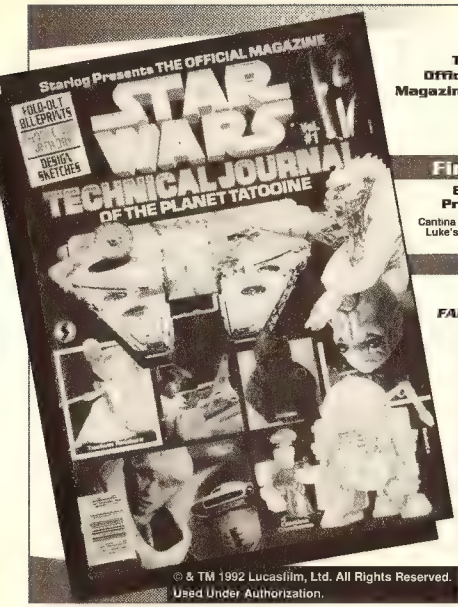

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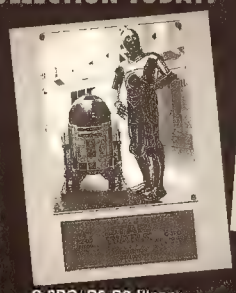

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Everyone remembers this heroine. Now, maybe, they'll know her name.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

The sexiest vampire in comics is back! After a five-issue mini-series from Harris Comics, Vampirella, star of the Warren-published black & white comics magazine from 1969-83, is returning to action in an all-new ongoing series. This time around, her adventures are being guided in *Vengeance of Vampirella* by writer Tom Sniegoski, who plans to make her a strong presence in comics for today's readers.

"I'm trying to re-establish Vampirella as a prominent character for the '90s. If you take a look at the older interpretations of the character, she's pretty much just a good-lookin' chick in a bathing suit," jokes Sniegoski. "She has been a damsel in distress. I want to make her a very strong female character, very powerful with a little gumption, but with the sensual qualities she had in the old Warren books. I wanted her to be a strong leading character, not just somebody who's there for the cheesecake and good girl art."

Like so many others faced with revitalizing a classic character, the creative team is returning to the heroine's roots. She'll be transformed for this ongoing series, with her background as told in the original stories in Warren's *Vampirella* magazine reworked.

"We're re-defining her origins and abilities," he says. "The whole business with the planet Draculon, where the rivers flow with blood—we're getting rid of that. We're fooling around with the idea that all of that was some

All Vampirella Art: Buzz

IT AWAKENS THE HUNTRESS IN ME.
"There is passion for hunting something deeply implanted in the human beast."
-Charles Dickens
--OLIVER TWIST
BLOODSHED

It's a dark dawn for the servants of evil—and the *Vengeance of Vampirella* will deliver us into the night.

type of implant put in her mind by someone we *don't* know. Now, she's on a quest to re-define herself. We're starting with a new first issue, and readers will see characters within the Vampirella Universe who know a little bit more than they're telling her. So, we have little hints being dropped here and there, getting rid of her belief that she's from Draculon. She's also learning that she has abilities that she never knew she had, including shape-shifting skills."

According to Sniegoski, the world established in the original *Vampirella* limited series from Harris will shape the *Vengeance of Vampirella*. "The land that she lives in now is quite a different place," he observes. "It's a world infested with the supernatural, so we have all types of ghoulies and ghosties floating around. One of the major things in the book is a shadowy organization that has sprung up called the Danse Macabre. We're not sure whether it's a government organization or a private organization, but it's quite large and powerful. They're watching to see which direction these supernatural threats go.

"We're not quite sure if they're good guys or bad guys, but Vampirella is going to have a lot of contact with them. They're in the process of trying to recruit her into the Danse Macabre as a Danser—people who have been enhanced, either supernaturally or scientifically, to be agents working for the Danse Macabre. We're going back and forth between these superhero/horror adventures to the more traditional Gothic horror stories involving the character."

Sniegoski's greatest attraction to this heroine is the powerful visual image presented by the character of Vampirella from the very first Warren issue, where she debuted, as older fans may remember, in a striking Frank Frazetta cover painting.

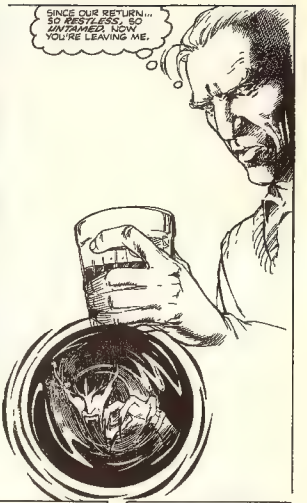
"She's an extremely powerful image that everyone remembers from their childhood," explains Sniegoski. "That costume—well, when you're 10 years old and you can't buy *Playboy*, you buy *Vampirella*! Right there, she has something going for her. I can't tell you how many people come up to me at conventions and say, 'Is *that* her name?' They *all* remember the costume and the magazine covers, they just didn't know what the character was called! This is a primal image in guys' minds."

It has been a while since the most sensual of vampires prowled the comics pages, but Vampirella is back—with a *Vengeance*.

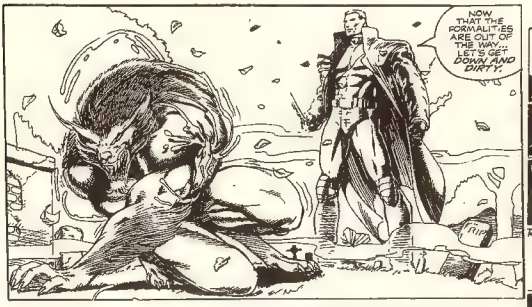
TROLLS HAVE A DISGUSTING HABIT OF MARKING THEIR HUNTING TERRITORIES WITH THEIR FOUL-SMELLING BODY FLUIDS.
I COULD HAVE TRACKED THIS ONE WITH A COLD.

Like many other characters, Vampirella was a reflection of the days and nights in which she first appeared. "I really didn't dislike anything, because the way the character has been written has always been a sign of the times," he says. "Kind of tongue-in-cheek, kind of goofy, but playful and fun. Harris is in the process right now of reprinting a lot of the old black-and-white stuff. It's fun to read, but I think there's more that can be done with her. She's a strong character, and putting her on the proper track could make for some very interesting stories."

Vampirella's past friends will also return. "Even the supporting characters, like Pendragon, the alcoholic magician, and Adam Van Helsing, the last of the Van Helsing line, are really cool," the writer notes. "There's a lot that can be done with them, things that they didn't really explore. If you look at the early issues of *Vampirella*, and then the issues that came five years later, there isn't much difference. It's pretty much the same character doing the same things over and over again."



Raves Sniegoski, "She's learning that she has abilities that she never knew she had, including shape-shifting skills."



Life is not all blood and roses for Vampirella. She has an assassin on her tail, and his name is Hemorrage.

SO MUCH OF WHAT I TOOK FOR GRANTED HAS TURNED OUT TO BE LIES, OR SO DRACULA SAYS. THERE'S SO MUCH I NEED TO KNOW... TO LEARN.
WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO SAY, VAMPIRELLA? LET IT OUT. I'LL UNDERSTAND.
YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT YOU, ADAM. THIS IS VERY DIFFICULT FOR ME.
I NEED TO FIND OUT THE TRUTH ABOUT MYSELF.

"On her quest to re-define herself, Vampirella will need help, especially from her boy friend, Adam Van Helsing.

Sniegoski says the opportunity to make his own additions to the Vampirella mythos was what made this project irresistible. "What I really liked was the chance to add to something that was already a prominent image in peoples' minds," he says. "You would be amazed at how many people know Vampirella—*everybody* knows Vampirella to some extent. Given the chance to add another couple of layers, to enhance her even more, was exciting. I also wanted to play with the *Vampirella* Universe—Kurt Busiek wrote the black-and-white mini-series published by Harris and distributed by Dark Horse, and he set up this supernatural world in which Vampirella lives. I'm playing with that, and I thought that would be fun, because it opens the doors for all types of wild things. That was a major attraction, the fact that I can expand on the character and play in this universe at the same time."

The new ongoing series will also allow plenty of opportunities to refine the current supporting players and develop new cast members. "Pendragon will turn out to be quite important to future stories, because he's no longer just a stage magician," the writer explains. "It's almost as if this supernatural world has given him the ability to actually *use* magic. He's not very good at it at first, and the fact that he drinks heavily doesn't help matters. But, he's going to turn out to be a relatively powerful character, and helpful in some of their adventures.

"We're putting Adam through the wringer. He was kind of wimpy and always whining, 'Oh, she's a vampire, oh, what should I do?' We're going to change him a *lot* as a character. Warren published an old series within *Eerie* called 'Night of the Jackass.' Basically, this story was about a highly addictive drug called Hyde-25 that tapped into the primal side of your personality and transformed you into this rampaging monster. The series was called 'Night of the Jackass' because the drug pointed the ears and elongated the face, almost into a donkey-type appearance. And your behavior was completely out of control!

"I'm bringing that back. Harris is re-

All Vampirella Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Harris Publications, Inc.

Hemorrage is lord and master of the water of life, blood. He can shape it to form these minions of terror.

viving the series in 1995 and calling it *Hyde-25*. And to bridge into that new series, we have, in a two-part story, Adam feeling a little inadequate and testing the waters with Hyde-25, taking the drug and changing himself. Adam becomes this other personality—it's almost like the do-gooder personality is being suppressed and this primal, vicious side comes forward. He's genetically changed by this drug. So, we're going to have a battle of personalities here. The repressed Adam tries to gain control, while the new Adam calls himself Bad Jack.

"You find out that when Adam was a child and he did something wrong, it was Bad Jack who did it, almost like an imaginary friend. That side has been repressed for so long, but it's coming forward now—'Adam had his chance, now it's *my* chance.' If anything, it just helps to enhance Adam all the more, so he's not just this whiny guy who gets saved by Vampirella every issue!"

Sniegoski is fast making a name for himself with his comics scripting. He co-wrote "Tooth Decay" for *Taboo* #1, then penned two three-issue mini-series for Caliber Press called *The Swords of Shar/Pei* and *The Guns of Shar/Pei*, almost a Jack Kirby-esque tribute to *Kamandi* that takes place in a post-apocalyptic world. "It was almost a warm-up showing me how to script," he says. "Working for a small company, you have a great deal of freedom. [Publisher] Gary Reed was great; he just said, 'Go with it!' "

The writer says he became involved with *Vampirella* almost by accident. "I was talking with Steve Bissette at a comic book show, and [Harris editor] Melanie Chadwick began talking to Steve," Sniegoski says. "After Steve introduced us, Melanie gave me her card and said, 'We're reviving all the old Warren material, why don't you give me a call?' I was a huge fan of the old Warren material, so I called her two days later about 'Night of the Jackass.' We talked every couple of days, and she mentioned she was having trouble finding a writer to take over *Vengeance of Vampirella*. Joking, I said, 'Let me give it a whack!' She said, 'If you're serious, I want a proposal on my desk by Thursday!' I thought it was too good an opportunity to pass up, so I read some old *Vampirellas* and wrote up a proposal. Melanie said it was exactly the direction they wanted to go, and hired me! It was a complete fluke. I was going to work on *Hyde-25* and some other Warren characters. I never expected to be attached to *Vampirella*!"

"What I really liked was the chance to add to something already prominent in people's minds," maintains Sniegoski.

Design & Layout: Calvin Lee

Sniegoski has taken Vampirella away from her "cute girl in a tight suit" roots and given her a heart, a soul and a man to love.

The series' first year will feature an assortment of artists on *Vengeance of Vampirella*. "Each of them will be doing different storylines," he explains. "Our war cry is 'Never late again!' The series *will not* be late. I've scripted the first 12 issues, and I've seen artwork on all of them. It's incredibly exciting, because the stuff is absolutely beautiful. An artist named Buzz has drawn the first two issues, John Stinzman did a couple and Kirk Van Wormer of *Nightstalkers* is going to be a regular. After these 12 issues are done, it'll probably alternate between Buzz and Kirk as regular artists.

"Each artist seems to have his own storyline, so it's not going to jar you with a different artist every issue—it certainly doesn't seem that way, because each person's art style fits that specific storyline. I'm really happy with the way it looks. The story arcs run between two and three issues, but they're all connected. I find it much easier, and it's easier for new people to jump on a book, when they can just jump onto a new storyline. It's not like Chris Claremont's *X-Men* that stretched for seven years. You couldn't jump onto that if you wanted to! The smaller storylines prevent boredom on the part of the reader, the writer and the artist."

Tom Sniegoski is excited at the prospect of guiding the adventures of comics' sexiest vampire, promising the best is yet to come.

"If you compared *Vengeance of Vampirella* to the first Vampirella from Harris, it's almost as if the first series was just a warm-up," he says. "I really think you'll see a transition from those first five issues to this new series. The starting gun has been fired with this new series, and we're off! The new direction is full steam ahead!" CS

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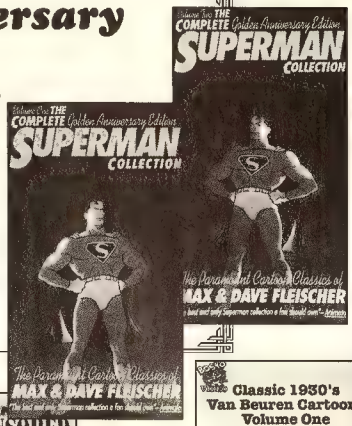
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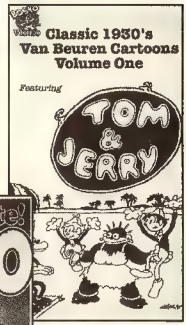

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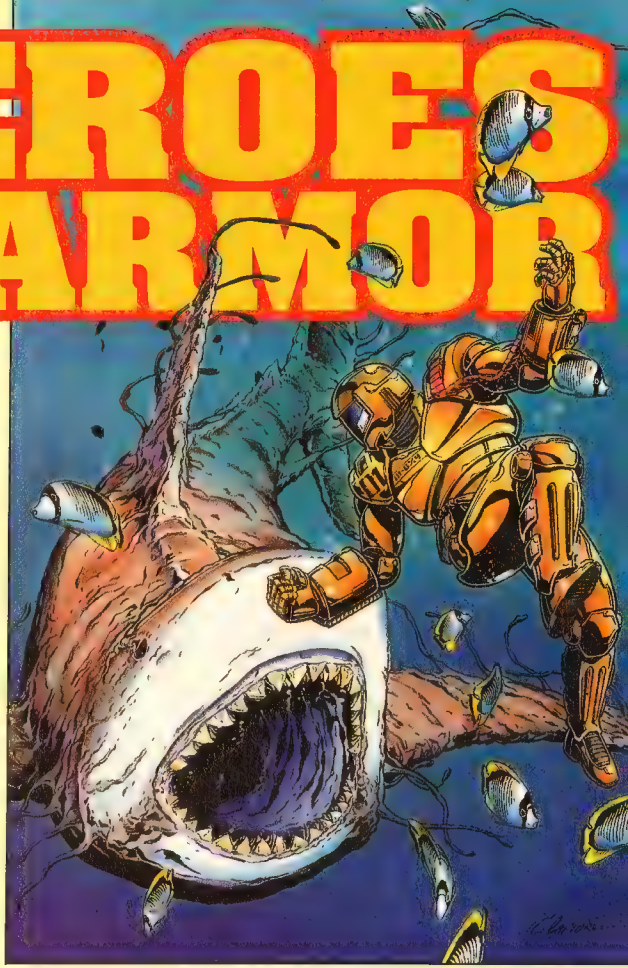


They're a few good men in hi-tech super suits—X-O & the Armorines.

By DREW BITTNER

They're big. They're bad. They're armored and looking for trouble. They're the Armorines, the latest heroes with their own series from Valiant Comics. After a spectacular launch as the *Armorines* #0 insert in *X-O Manowar* #25, these four armor-clad Marines are crossing the globe as the U.S. government's own special squad of troubleshooters. Written by Jorge Gonzalez, with art by Jim Calafiore, Rodney Ramos and Eric Lusk, the series promises to deliver the usual action and adventure, but Gonzalez says that there will be much more than that.

"This is different from other books in that most teams are out to serve their own interests," he says. "These guys have to answer to Uncle Sam. There'll be lots of *Mission: Impossible*-style stories, but I have lots to say about these guys apart from what kind of weaponry they carry."

The Armorines are specially-trained Marines wearing armor constructed by the U.S. government. Originally designed and trained to destroy X-O Manowar, their mandate now includes doing their country's dirtiest work in the utmost secrecy.

"They're going to be America's secret weapon, and they learn how the government does things out of sight of the cameras, which may *not* sit well with them," he adds. "There will be times when they won't agree with their mission—which causes huge problems. There are only four of these guys, plus four co-pilots, and they have to work as a team. If they don't, if one guy isn't totally committed to what they're doing, they could all get trashed. And that *does* happen...."

Due to their different backgrounds and attitudes, it takes a tough, battle-hardened leader to keep this group together. Gonzalez sees Gunnery Sergeant Harold "Gunny" Lewis as the book's focal point, as well as the team's field commander. "We see most events through his eyes," Gonzalez says. "Most of what we see early on is his view of the men under his command—how they interact, how they work together. He's the oldest, with the most experience, which the younger guys find they need."

Lewis is a divorced Vietnam vet with an 18-year-old daughter, who lives with his ex-wife in New York City. He left the service to save his marriage, a failed effort that led him to alcoholism, from which he is now recovering.

"He's the subject of our first *Armorines Yearbook* story, where we learn why he chose the Celtic symbol that's stencilled on his helmet," Gonzalez says. "I don't really like the comparison, but I see him as their Captain America—the guy whose ideals have been forged by hard experiences, so his values are from the heart. He is the heart of this team. Unfortunately, he doesn't know that when they were putting the group together, Senator Ackerman complained about his being put in charge. Ackerman wanted a younger guy, who would be easier to

Art: Jim Calafiore

Art: Mark Moretti

The Spider-Aliens haven't been taken seriously by people in the past, but that's going to change as they menace the Armorines, X-O and Ninjak.

Writer Jorge Gonzalez plans to add spice to *Armorines* by introducing elements of African-American and his own Cuban-American culture.

control. His plan right now is, once another guy is trained to be an Armorine, Gunny is out."

Among the other Armorines, perhaps the one closest to Gonzalez's heart is Lance Corporal Antonio Cordova. "He's a Cuban-American from Miami. Much like me," Gonzalez says with a laugh.

Gonzalez's cast of characters was designed to represent the diversity of races and backgrounds seen in the modern military: Both Gunny and Lance Corporal James Earl Williams are African-Americans, while the remaining Armorine, Staff Sergeant Michael Sirot, is white.

"It's not only that minority characters aren't seen much in comics—it's that there's so much culture and stuff they can bring to a story. In one story, the Armorines go to Miami, and then maybe to Cuba. They meet Cordova's family and have dinner with them, which lets me use Spanish (spoken by the family) and the kind of foods they would like—things you don't see in most comic books."

He says that it's possible this cross-culture exchange will give some of the characters new interests. "I could see Gunny really liking Spanish-style cooking," he says. "I can definitely see Gunny looking around for Cuban cigars when they're in Miami, too."

Gonzalez says that the characters themselves are still forming in his mind: Williams, 20 years old, is one of the team's wing men; he is also a demolitions expert. He's basically friendly, and a little naive. Cordova, 22, the other wing man, is engaged to be married to his high-school sweetheart within a year. And Sirot, 29, the team's point man, is part of the National Security Agency, which oversees and coordinates U.S. intelligence missions. His presence on the team is a sore point, especially since he doesn't share the Marines' code of honor.

"There's an immediate tension, because this guy is from outside," Gonzalez says. "He has an attitude they don't like. They have to work with him, but they don't have to like him—and they don't. It's sort of like how the Soviets used to post KGB officers in all their combat divisions, to make sure there was nothing subversive going on. The guys are going to feel that pressure, a sort of 'Big Brother is watching' thing. Lots of things can happen to a point man," he adds.

Each Armorine has a co-pilot, who sits in the command bunker and operates several of the suit's functions by remote control. Gonzalez explains that the armor is so complicated, one man can't handle the whole job.

"The Armorines learn right off the bat how much they need to rely on their co-pilots," he says. "The co-pilots literally have their lives in their hands. Some readers are comparing them to Softcore of the H.A.R.D. Corps, but this is very different; it's a lot more personal and one-on-one. Softcore runs a whole platoon of these guys at the same time; each co-pilot only handles one Armorine."

Lewis' co-pilot is Major Myra Lane, a former non-combat chopper pilot who does everything by the book.

"Gunny doesn't get along with her, because she represents many things he feels are wrong with the modern Marines, and the military in general. She's a woman who holds a higher rank without having had any combat experience, and she's 'by-the-book' while he knows the book doesn't cover everything."

The other co-pilots include 2nd Lt. Clark Hossen (owner of the team's mascot bulldog "Chesty"), Lt. Manuel Dominguez and Lt. Jonathan Pierce.

The Armorines have to face a variety of assignments around the globe. Starting with their kickoff issue, wherein they search for a missing Navy SEAL in Australia, the Armorines' first major story arc leads to issues #6 and #7: "The Gathering."

"X-O shows up for this one, which is the last Spider-Aliens story," the writer asserts. "It's a big one—we send these guys off with a bang. There's a big battle in space, lots of ships and energy blasts and stuff, the whole shebang. The lead-in issues show the Spider-Aliens being based underwater. This is the first time the U.S. government has actually met these aliens face-to-face, instead of just seeing their technology (like the X-O armor). The pieces they've already seen finally fall into place."

Gonzalez admits that the Spider-Aliens never developed into the kind of serious villains Valiant originally hoped they would become. "Nobody took them really seriously," he says. "Even though they have space travel and things like X-O armor, we think of them as 'spaghetti-heads.' I mean, if you saw these guys on the street, they would be *terrifying*! But everybody laughs them off. We're changing that."

Although the aliens themselves may be gone, lots of their technology is still floating around on Earth. "The Armorines are going to find themselves fighting stuff that's better than their armor. Their armor is an imitation of Spider-Alien X-O armor—and they're going to be facing the real thing. Superior weaponry is something every soldier worries about, and the Armorines are thrown into battle against it."

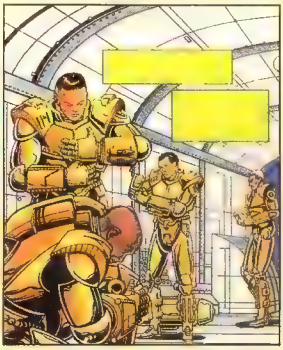
The Armorines are also going to encounter H.A.R.D. Corps before their own series gets rolling, wherein old friends meet and both sides are left with some serious soul-searching to do. "Gunny doesn't like the mission they're sent on, and when the H.A.R.D. Corps guys show up, things just get worse," Gonzalez says. "I was talking with [*Harbinger* and *H.A.R.D. Corps* editor] Maurice Fontenot and we agreed that the H.A.R.D. Corps guys could easily be seen as terrorists. What has Harada really done wrong? The crossover reveals some hints about Gunny's past and his connection with

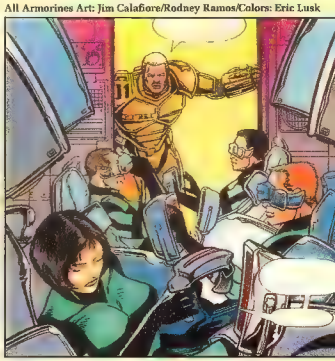
Design & Layout: Len H. Leake

Art: Rik Levins/Kathryn Bolinger

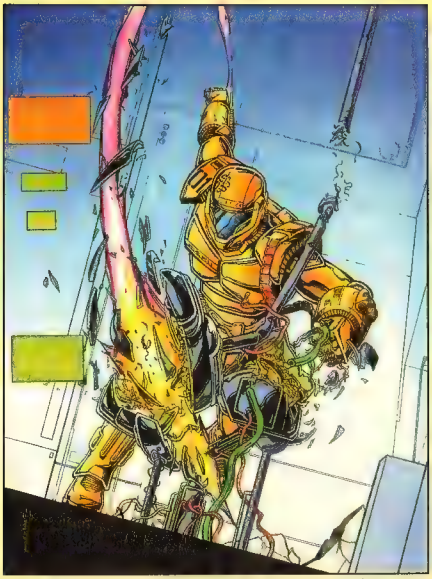
With his armor killed by the Spider-Aliens, Aric must rely on his own resources to survive...until another suit comes along.

All Armorines Art: Jim Calafiore/Rodney Ramos/Colors: Eric Lusk





"The Armorines learn right off the bat how much they need to rely on their co-pilots," Gonzalez explains. "The co-pilots have their lives in their hands."



The Armorines are a specially-trained squad of troubleshooters, doing Uncle Sam's dirty work, whether they agree with it or not.

Art: Tom Ryder

"Learn as much as you can, look for the breaks, and make the most of them," is Gonzalez's recipe for success in comics.

Turok & Solar, Copyright 1994 Voyager Communications Inc. & Western Publishing Co. Inc./Trademark Western Publishing Inc.

All X-O Manowar, Ninjak, Armorines, H.A.R.D. Corps Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Voyager Communications Inc.

It's heavy metal mayhem as the Armorines and the H.A.R.D. Corps go toe-to-toe.

H.A.R.D. Corps.

"I'm pretty sure that Ax [from *Harbinger* and *X-O*] is going to show up. After all, he's a punk kid with a suit of armor, so why wouldn't he meet the Armorines?

"I've got some other villains in mind, but I don't want to make this a villain-of-the-month thing, where the bad guys are disposable. I would rather they were memorable and really tough. I'm a fan of the James Bond movies, so my villains will probably be more like SPECTRE and Auric Goldfinger, the classy types. The Armorines won't be able to go in blasting every time...these sort of villains challenge them in different ways. Don't get me wrong, I think Master Darque [from *Shadowman*] and Dr. Eclipse are good villains, but we need more worthwhile characters [like them] for our heroes to face. I would like to have the Armorines confront Webnet [from *Ninjak*] sometime."

Meanwhile, big events are happening in *X-O Manowar*, Gonzalez's other book. In the much-advertised issue #28, the armor dies—for real.

"Yup, Shanhara's really dead," Gonzales announces with a grin. "But since the book's still called *X-O*, there has to be a suit of armor in it somewhere, so..."

He confirms that, although the "goodskin" dies, Aric gets his hands on another suit of armor in time to help the Armorines finish off the Spider-Aliens. Revenge is the primary motive this time; the Spider-Aliens murdered Aric's armor.

"We find out in issue #28 that the aliens were poisoning the water to Aric's house with a silicon virus, deadly to the X-O armor. Every time Aric wore the suit, he poisoned it just a little more, until it was weak enough to be affected by their weapons...and they killed it. Aric finds another suit of armor by issue #30, but the death of the 'goodskin' is a major event in his life," he says. "The aliens needed the armor out of the picture because it threatened their plans."

Without the armor, even temporarily, Aric is forced to rely on his own resources—which is something Gonzalez enjoys. "Doing stories about the guy out of the suit is more interesting, because Aric is a very capable and intelligent person. Folks I've described him to think he's stupid because he was raised in a pre-industrial society, but just being a barbarian doesn't make him dumb. He has got a very different set of values and attitudes, which he hasn't lost. Now he must use his resourcefulness, since he's vulnerable."

The decision to kill the armor came when Gonzalez and Valiant's upper-level management wanted to do something big in *X-O* but didn't know exactly what to do.

"We had some meetings about it, [senior vice president] Jon Hartz, [editor-in-chief] Bob Layton and me," Gonzalez remembers. "Most of the talks were like, 'Kill Randy? Aric?' We decided that if we were going to take a radical step, don't do the expected—so we settled on killing the armor."

Without his trusty metal suit, Aric has to take action to keep himself secure. "For one thing, he's going to take stronger charge of Orb Industries. He let things slide for a long time, but that's going to change. Also, his relationship with Randy heats up. In issue #29, a major supporting character dies. It affects everybody, and causes a lot of tension between Randy and Aric."

Gonzalez admits that Randy is a fun character to write. "She really had no background before I took over as writer," he says. "I invented her whole secret agent background, her group of friends—who *will* be showing up again—and had the idea of putting her into the armor. I plan to do that again, since I thought it worked well the first time. She has a lot of background that hasn't been revealed yet."

He also plans to re-introduce Lauren, an exotic dancer who was working her way through law school in early *X-O* issues. Now she has graduated and come back into Aric's life, which is guaranteed to make Randy furious.

Art: Rik Levins/Kathryn Rolinger

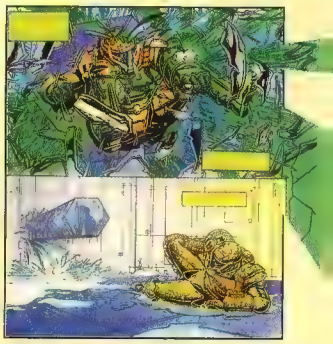
In addition to writing *Armorines* and *X-O*, the versatile Gonzalez, who got his start at Valiant as a colorist, is also the editor of *Bloodshot* and *Solar*.

Also in future issues, readers will meet the founder of Orb Industries, who's now looking to return with a vengeance. "Orb existed before the Spider-Aliens took it over," Gonzalez says. "They forced out the original owner before Aric forced the aliens out. But now he's back and he's the major villain of the series for awhile.

"I've got the book plotted through issue #37, and I know the events up through #48 or #50," he says. "I don't work too far in advance, so that I can be flexible. If a good idea comes along, I don't want to kick it out because it doesn't fit into my schedule."

Having moved into writing two books, Gonzalez has nothing but praise for his artistic teams. He has excellent qualifications to judge their work, having been the original colorist on *X-O*.

(continued on page 63)



"The Armorines won't be able to go blasting in *every* time," promises Gonzalez, who sees them facing more subtle challenges in the future.

FOREVER

All Art: Paul Ryan

Paul Ryan plans on drawing the FF's exploits for a long, long time.

Under the helm of artist Paul Ryan and writer Tom DeFalco, the last three years of *The Fantastic Four* have been a roller-coaster ride of thrills. Ryan climbed aboard the Marvel rollercoaster seven years ago, and has thrilled readers with his work on *DP-7*, *Avengers West Coast*, *Iron Man*, *Squadron Supreme*, *Spider-Man* and *Ravage 2099*. And he's settled comfortably behind the reins of the World's Greatest Comic Magazine—*The Fantastic Four*.

In Ryan and DeFalco's 31-issue tenure on *The Fantastic Four*, changes, new characters and plot twists have occurred every issue. The action began as soon as Ryan and DeFalco took over. Johnny Storm discovered that he was *not* married to Alicia Masters (the Thing's ex-girl friend), but to a Skrull agent named Lyja. From there, the Fantastic Four went on to rescue Alicia, get lost in space and meet Devos, the Devastator. Johnny destroyed a large part of Empire State University, sending the FF into financial ruin. Then, Johnny discovered that he's the father of Lyja's child. Ben Grimm had part of his face torn off. Sharon Ventura became an abominable thing, and Reed's father kidnapped young Franklin Richards, who later showed up again as a teenager. Reed Richards is dead and the team is in a shambles. Scott Lang, the Ant Man, has replaced Reed. There's enough misery around Four Freedoms Plaza to fill several TV soap operas.

"I *feel* for the Fantastic Four," Ryan admits. "Every once in awhile, I'll ask Tom DeFalco if we can take it a little easy on them. But, we don't—because life isn't like that."

Life is indeed not like that, and Ryan knows it from personal experience. In the early '80s, Ryan worked on his own comics projects, producing a book for Charlton's *Bullseye* title, a sort of showcase for artists trying to break into the business. *Bullseye* folded, however, before Ryan's work could be printed. Fortunately, Bill Black at Americomics saw his work and published it. Shortly afterwards, Ryan met Bob Layton, who was looking for a background artist. Ryan learned the basics of comics from Layton and Jim Shooter, and planned out his career as an inker, all the while

Fantastic

By
ANDREW
THOMAS
LEE

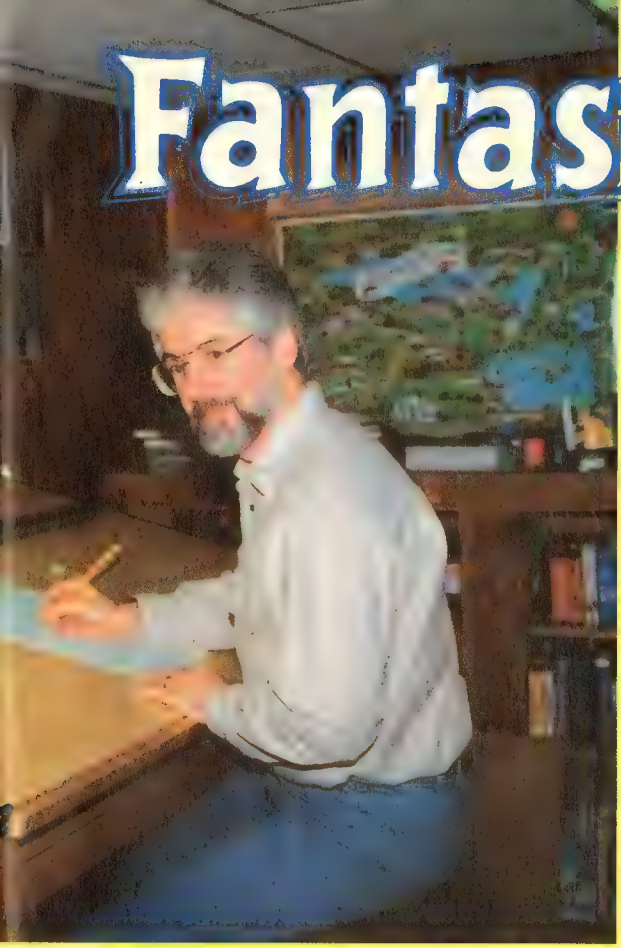
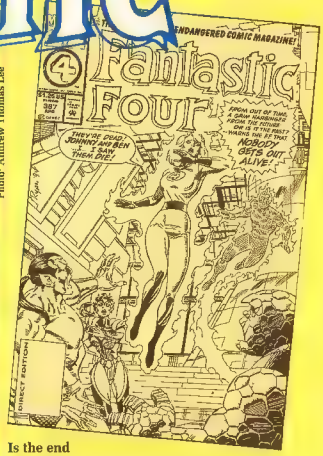


Photo: Andrew Thomas Lee



Is the end near for the Fantastic Four? Not according to Ryan, who promised *FF* writer Tom DeFalco that they would try to match the record run of series creators Stan Lee and Jack Kirby.

Artist Paul Ryan has made a name for himself as a "team guy," having drawn *Squadron Supreme*, *Avengers West Coast* and *DP-7* prior to his current stint as penciller of *The Fantastic Four*.

working a full-time job. In 1985, Ryan took the jump into comics from a secure, 11-year career in the graphics department of an engineering firm.

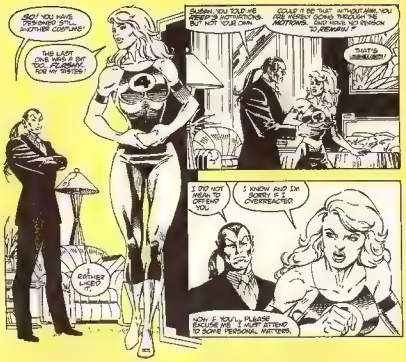
"I took my two weeks vacation to do my first Marvel assignment. I handed it in and they handed me another," explains Ryan. "I thought, 'Oh no! I don't have any vacation time left, what am I going to do?' Bob Layton was very supportive. He said, 'Look, you've got the chance. You're going to have to make a decision. You either take your chances now, or it may not happen.' So, he took me around to the different Marvel offices and we lined up enough inking assignments to keep me busy for a month-and-a-half. It was soul-searching time. I gave notice at the engineering firm. Then, the assignments didn't come in. For some reason or another, they were set aside or delayed. I was sitting at home twiddling my thumbs. No money coming in, but a lot of money going out."

Luckily, Layton suggested Ryan turn in some pencil samples. They immediately landed him the Thor graphic novel *I, Whom Gods Would Destroy*. Ryan has been busily pencilling ever since. His first regular assignment was the New Universe's *DP-7*. Reflecting on that comics line's fate, Ryan says, "The New Universe was pretty much [then-editor-in-chief] Jim Shooter's vision. The problem was that not everyone was quite sure what that vision was, and they felt confused and restricted by it. I think the 2099 Universe was thought out a little more completely. The writers and editor sat down and decided what it was going to be about. Before the first 2099 stories were even written, [*2099* editor] Joey Cavalieri came up with a 'Futureverse Bible,' describing the world of 2099 and some of its conflicts. Within the context of those conflicts, you can pretty much write what you want. It was a more solid structure. The writers knew what they had to deal with, and it was easier for them."

Ryan spent much of his early career at Marvel as the "team guy," with assignments on *Squadron Supreme*, *Avengers West Coast* and *DP-7*. He views his work on *Fantastic Four* quite differently, though. "I bought the first issue of *Fantastic Four* in 1961. I go back a long way with them," he says. "The Fantastic Four were so different from anything else that I had seen up to that

All Fantastic Four, Avengers & Associated Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group

With Lyja, the Skrull he thought was his wife Alicia, Johnny Storm has become the proud parent of a bouncing baby...egg.


SO! YOU HAVE STRUNG STILL ANOTHER COCOON!
THIS LAST ONE WAS A RIP TOO, ALSHAU, FOR MY TASTES!
SUSAN, YOU TOLD ME KEEP 'S MOTIVATIONS BUT NOT YOUR OWN EMOTIONS!
COULD IT BE THAT WITHOUT HAVING YOU HERE? GOING THROUGH THE EMOTIONS, AND HOW, NO REASON TO PREGNANT!
THAT'S RELIEVED!
I DID NOT MEAN TO OFFEND YOU.
I KNOW, AND I'M SORRY IF I OVERREACTED.
RATHER LIKED IT!
NOW IF YOU'LL PLEASE EXCUSE ME, I MUST ATTEND TO SOME PERSONAL MATTERS.

Art: Paul Ryan/Dan Bulanadi

Reed Richards' death gives Namor the opportunity to try to convince Sue to leave the Fantastic Four.

time. They were like real people with real powers. What's special about them is that they're a family unit. The closest I ever came to doing *Fantastic Four* was *DP-7*, because they acted like a family unit. With the Fantastic Four, you can't just throw somebody into the group, because it's like adopting somebody into your family. You love them. You cherish them. Either from their perceptions or your perceptions, there's always a little bit of difference in how they're treated. Larry Hama, I think, tried treating the Avengers like a *Mission: Impossible* team. The Avengers had a core person in charge and whatever the mission was, he would call in the people needed. You don't really get that camaraderie, that caring, that you get in a family unit. You *know* Johnny, Reed, Sue and Ben. You know how they're going to react in certain conditions. You know that no matter what happens, each would put their life on the line for the other."

The *Fantastic Four* has a rich, deep history. Ryan follows in the footsteps of memorable runs on the book, first by creators Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, and later by John Byrne. "The Byrne issue I remember most is about this little boy, who is such a fan of the Human Torch he eventually sets himself on fire. The way Byrne dealt with the story was so sensitively done that it was one of the few times that I wanted to write in to somebody."

Of his predecessors' influence on his work, Ryan notes, "I try to incorporate some of the way Byrne and Kirby would do their background machinery. Kirby brought a certain dynamic to his drawings. I try to do that myself. I try

"Every once in a while, I'll ask Tom DeFalco if we can take it easy on them. But we don't—because life's not like that," Ryan says.

to exaggerate movement. Occasionally, I'll use Kirby's three-panel sequence-type storytelling, where you actually get the impression of somebody moving. I remember, from his very first issue of *Fantastic Four*, a scene where the Human Torch is being chased by this heat-seeking missile in three panels. In issue #2, you see the Thing smashing against a steel door three or four times until he breaks through. I thought that was so cool, because it was almost as if Kirby was *animating* the page."

According to Ryan, there are interesting adventures in store for the Fantastic Four. The FF will set out on a cross-time search for Reed Richards, using information from a computer data bank taken from Dr. Doom's castle in Latveria. Sue and Namor will hit it off. Believing Reed dead, Namor tries to convince Sue to leave the team. After all, the Sub-Mariner has been sweet on Sue since *FF* #4. And now, with Reed out of the way, Namor feels he finally has a chance for romance. Meanwhile, Scott Lang also develops a crush on Sue, leading to further tension.

Expect a new—and unusual—addition to the family. Lyja will give birth...to an egg. This idea was "hatched" by Ryan as a result of the approach that he and DeFalco take in creating the book. "Many times, Tom will set up a situation, put the characters into it, and let the characters play it out in his mind like real people would. Therefore, the way the story ends isn't always the way he originally envisioned it. This is good, because it's more spontaneous. I spend more time on the actual story than Tom does, because I'm spending two or three weeks drawing it. As I'm drawing a scene, I think, 'What if something else happened here?' and I'll talk to Tom about it. Lyja's baby being an egg came from one of those 'what if?' scenarios."

Ryan had reasoned that if the Skrulls were indeed reptilian in nature, it would only make sense for Lyja to give birth to an egg. "From that idea, Tom thought to bring in the Collector. Supposedly, Johnny and Lyja are the first union of a Skrull and a human, so it would be an unusual offspring, and would be extremely valuable to somebody like the Collector."

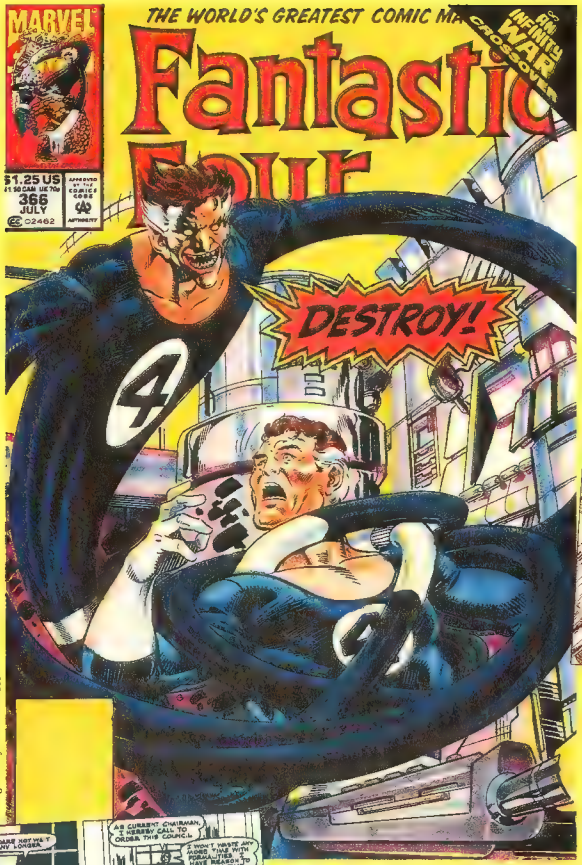
The artist has worked with numerous writers in his years at Marvel, including Byrne. "John Byrne plots out, generally, a year or two in advance, so he knows where he's starting and where he's going to end up," says Ryan. "He just works it through to the end. Tom DeFalco has an idea of the direction he wants to take, but no matter how much you plan for the future, something unexpected will happen along the way to alter the course of events. So he always leaves himself open for any ideas that might come along.

"We're going to take the Fantastic Four on a rollercoaster ride of thrills and adventure," raves Ryan.

"I like that, because it gives more latitude for storylines. It does drive me crazy, because I never know where we're going to end up. We're going to take the Fantastic Four on a rollercoaster ride of thrills and adventure. Well, that's fine, but I would like to know where we're going to stop, because I'm on the same rollercoaster."

The 2099 Universe gave Ryan his chance to work with one of the founders of the Marvel Universe himself, Stan Lee. "The first plot we got on *Ravage* from Stan was very well-written," says Ryan. "There was so much in that first plot that we couldn't expand the pictures or do large-scale things. So, Joey Cavalieri, the *2099* editor, decided to split the first story in half. This allowed us to expand the scale of the images. Joey decided where to cut the story and he just let me play with it. We broke up the next plot into two or three issues, which culminated with Ravage gaining his power-blasting ability. It was fun because I was able to take the ending to Stan's plot and just run with it."

His association with *Ravage* led to Ryan's newest assignment—the *Spider-Man* Sunday newspaper strip. The two worked so well together on *Ravage* that Lee called on Ryan to take over the Sunday strip. "Paul is not only one of the finest,



Design & Layout: Calvin Lee

WE DARE NOT VIEW IT ANY LONGER.
AS CURRENT CHAIRMAN, I HEREBY CALL TO ORDER THIS COMICS
I WON'T WASTE ANY MORE TIME WITH FORMALITIES. YOU HAVE ALL RECEIVED THAT
AND EVEN NOW IS PREPARING TO STRIKE
ULTRON HAS BEEN RECREATED

Art: Courtesy Paul Ryan

Marvel Comics rejected this sample, submitted by Ryan in 1978, but these days he's working with Stan Lee himself, as artist on the *Spider-Man* Sunday newspaper strip.

most cooperative artists I've worked with," Lee says, "but also one of the nicest guys you'll ever find."

Ryan switches gears regularly in taking on the strip. "I go from a comic book, where the editor is telling me 'Bigger panels! Bigger layouts! Stretch the envelope!' and then I go back to the newspaper strip the next day, and it's like imploding. It can be restricting and a little frustrating at times. Not only are the panels smaller, but you are also restricted by the newspapers and syndicates on how you can use them. The newspapers must be able to cut up the panels and stack them any

Big changes, new characters and plot twists have rocked every one of Paul Ryan's issues of "The World's Greatest Comic Magazine."

The Fantastic Four of the present face off with the FF of the past, as the team embarks on a cross-time search for Reed Richards.

Art: Paul Ryan/Dan Bulanadi

way necessary to accommodate their specific space requirements."

As a result of the size limitations and schedules, the *Spider-Man* strip is produced in full scripts, not the typical Marvel-style script of a descriptive plot, followed by pencils, followed by dialogue. Panels are described in great detail in the strip scripts. Ryan remains undaunted by the constraints of his task. "Stan has never asked me to redraw anything. Occasionally, he'll ask me to do more close-ups, because the strip is reduced so small in the newspaper. Stan has made suggestions and asked me to draw Mary Jane more the way John Romita Sr. drew her. He just likes her to look that way and it maintains consistency between the daily and Sunday strips."

Ryan admits that his interpretation of Spider-Man wouldn't be quite the same in comic books. "If I were doing Spidey for a comic, I would try to give more scope to the surroundings. I would try to establish more of where he lives and what he does. There are a couple of things that are different in the newspaper strip. [Unlike the comic,] Mary Jane is not a model or a soap opera star. She works as a sales clerk in a computer store. I would like

to do the more glamorous side of Mary Jane. I would like to draw her with the hairstyles that Todd McFarlane came up with, because they're more up-to-date. I've drawn Spider-Man in *The Fantastic Four*, and his body language is a little more exaggerated, simply because I have more room to work with," says Ryan.

The newspaper strip has afforded Ryan the opportunity to participate in some comic book history, as the Spider-Man strip crosses over with a Marvel comic book. The cross-over, "The Mutant Agenda," stars Spidey, the Beast and the Hobgoblin. "We recently had a Spider-Man and Daredevil team-up. That has happened so rarely in the newspaper that we had to re-introduce the characters to each other. I think Spider-Man works well when you have him pitted against super-villains. Ordinarily, we have him pitted against petty crooks and thieves. For me, it was much more exciting doing Marvel villains against a Marvel superhero, as opposed to Spider-Man vs. two thugs or a kidnapper. Spider-Man has great potential for strength, agility and strategy. Two ordinary street thugs shouldn't even get him breathing heavy. He needs *powerful* villains."

This project was a new kind of challenge for both Ryan and the creators working on the cross-over comic book. "We had a little bit of difficulty coordinating things between the comic book artist and the newspaper strip," Ryan explains. "I mentioned to Danny Fingeroth, the *Spider-Man* editor, that if we ever did this again, I would like to do both parts. It would save a lot of time, as far as keeping the other person aware of what the villains and backgrounds look like."

"You *know* Johnny, Reed, Sue and Ben. What's special about them is that they're a family unit," says Ryan of the team he has loved since he read *FF* #1 in 1961.

Ryan's love of comics dates back to childhood. He remembers early influences from the newspaper strips, "When I was a kid, before I even got into comic books, I would immediately grab the comics section of the Sunday paper and park myself under the living room coffee table, where nobody could get at me, and spread out the comics." Ryan would thrill to the adventures of Hal Foster's *Prince Valiant*, Dan Barry's *Phantom* and Mac Raboy's *Flash Gordon*.

Later, he discovered comic books and Curt Swan's *Superman*. "Swan's work was like a quantum leap into a more realistic depiction of Superman. I thought that was great! When I was six or seven years old, my mother would take me to get a haircut at the barber shop. I never used to mind going because they had *Superman* comics there. One time, she tried to convince me to get a wiffle, a crew-cut. There was a young barber there who used to call it the 'Superman special,' because he knew I would go for it. Curt Swan was the ultimate, as far as I was concerned." Later, Ryan was influenced by Gil Kane, Kirby, John Buscema, Neal Adams and Byrne. "To list all my influences, I'd need an encyclopedia."

Ryan had always planned on a career in comics. In 1968, as a sophomore at the Massachusetts College of Art, Ryan wrote to Lee, asking if he could visit the Marvel Comics offices. Ryan received a friendly postcard stating that this wasn't possible due to schedule constraints. Ryan remained undaunted. "I called the Marvel offices and pretended that I hadn't received the reply card. I spoke to someone named Allen Brodsky. I introduced myself and explained that I was an art student and I had written to Lee. Allen Brodsky explained that Stan didn't have time, but he told me to stop by and he would show me around. So, I went with my family to the Marvel offices. They weren't interested in comics at all, so they waited down in the lobby. I went upstairs and Allen showed me around. I met Marie Severin, Herb Trimpe, John Verpooten and Bill Everett. I watched Herb working on a cover for *The Hulk*, with the Leader in it. I don't know how I did it, but somehow, I wrangled an original sketch that Neal Adams had done for an *X-Men* cover. I walked out of there on clouds. I went down to the lobby and my family said, 'You'll never guess who we saw! Anne Bancroft!' I

(continued on page 62)

The most often-asked question about *Batman: The Animated Series* is, "When are new episodes going to air?"

Twenty have been made for the second season, but most won't see broadcast until the fall, a *year* after a second season would normally begin.

Why has the Fox Network waited so long to renew its two-time Emmy winner?

Producer Eric Radomski is as baffled as any on the *Batman* crew. "I don't know why, 'cause the series was number one; it did great; it held the position throughout the whole season and into [ratings] sweeps for February [1993]. Some of the episodes were in their second or third run. Everybody was going, 'Well, why don't they order more? What's going on?' We never really got the final answer as to *what* the delay was."

It wasn't until late April 1993 that Fox ordered 20 new episodes. But there wasn't enough time to make them for fall broadcast. So, Warners pulled five first season episodes and ran them that September. Five second season episodes are supposed to air this May: "Trial," "House & Garden," "Avatar," "Sideshow" and "A Bullet for Bullock." Fifteen will air on Fox's Saturday-morning schedule this fall, with a minute trimmed per episode in a retitled format called *The Adventures of Batman & Robin*.

As for a third season, "They still have the option to order more, but I don't know if they're going to," Radomski says. "It may have to do with budget. It's an expensive series, but you get what you pay for.

"I *have* heard gossip that action/adventure isn't like a comedy series where you can see it two or three times and pick up on the jokes. Once you know the plot of an action/adventure show, you really don't need to see it again unless you're just a big fan. *That* might have something to do with it," Radomski speculates.

KNIGHT VISION

That master of dark deco, Eric Radomski, looks behind the mask of the animated Batman.

By BOB MILLER

Photo: Bob Miller

Guiding the animated Dark Knight's present and future, producer Eric Radomski takes *Batman: The Animated Series* into a new season.

With the series airing on Saturday morning, will Fox's Broadcast Standards & Practices (BS&P) be more restrictive about the show's content?

"The BS&P concerns were put to sleep after the series was successful," Radomski replies. "They're still always going to watch for blood and the really extreme violence, but we've found methods for getting around that stuff. We know they're going to cut a percentage out, but there's a certain percentage they'll leave in.

"We got away with *plenty* in the last season. There are plenty of fights. Just really dramatic and intense scenes that come off stronger than when we would actually show a death scene.

"The death of Robin's parents is the best example. You don't see anything. It has everything to do with the staging and things that BS&P has no control over; the post-production mix, where you have sound FX and this crowd noise going and this really emotional music, and people just get caught up in that and it's like, 'Holy cow! This kid's *parents* died.' But, you never saw *anything*. You saw them fall off-screen and that was it. Everyone reacted and everyone *knew* it happened, but you didn't *see* it. So, there's that little bit of trickery that we did to get our point across."

With *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm*, the crew didn't have to contend with the network's BS&P. Instead, they had to consider the movie ratings system. "They [Warners] wanted us to definitely keep the film 'PG.' We shot a Leica reel of the whole film and ran that for the executives, and for Jean [MacCurdy, head of Warners Animation] and the crew," Radomski says. "By the time we got to the final mix, they had a preview screening for the kids and parents and then for teenagers. It was to our benefit because the kids loved it; the parents loved it, and they had no problems with the violence or the storytelling. As a result, they recommended the film.

"But, to keep it within a 'PG' rating, the only thing they suggested was toning down sound effects in two areas: A tombstone falls and kills one of the gangsters, and it sounded, they felt, too crunchy," Radomski chuckles. "They didn't want to hear all of the bones crunching.

"Later, the Joker is fighting Andrea, and he belts her on-screen three times. They wanted those punches toned down—not animation-wise, but sound-wise, because they were crunchy.

"That's pretty much the only limitations they put on us."

Design & Layout: Calvin Lee

KNIGHT VISION

Radomski was the mastermind behind Gotham's visual style. "I laid in these big, flat areas of black and did the simple lighting on the buildings. It's vintage detective

"I don't care for the Riddler a whole lot," states Radomski. His directorial debut was also the Riddler's bow, "If You're So Smart, Why Aren't You Rich?"

Radomski says. "We had one scene after the first rough cut screening where Batman gets clipped by this autogyro. The overseas animators had a little bit of fun with it. Blood squirted out of his arm, and when it flew out, it made a web-like shape, so it hung up in the air a little while, and they thought, 'Well, that's too much.' We agreed. He still gets cut and blood still comes out, but it goes away quicker.

"In the film, we have gunfire galore, a couple of murders and characters smoking [the bad guys smoke]. Bruce Wayne gets laid for the first time, which is kind of cool. So, we did pretty much everything we *wanted* to do for the film. As far as I'm concerned, it's done *much* more tastefully than a lot of Japanese animation, and even some live-action films where it's just violence for violence's sake."

After four weeks in release, *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm* grossed about $6 million, much less than the crew had expected.

"I'm personally disappointed at the way it was handled once it left the animation studio," Radomski says. "The film opened across the country in 1,500 theaters, which we were excited about, but it didn't show in the evenings. That affected it in a big way. It could have done much better had it been promoted and advertised as a *real* movie, and let people have the opportunity to go and see it. I don't know all the rhymes and reasons for the studio choosing to distribute the film the way they did, but that's something you have no control over. You make the film, you do the best you can."

Despite those disappointments, it's anticipated that *Phantasm*'s home video release next month will do quite well, and a sequel has been discussed. "The latest I've heard is it's *not* going to be for Christmas, but they're definitely interested in doing another film. Warners is currently in the running to create the fifth network. If that happens, our division will be swamped with work. They're still in the process of assembling a really good feature idea—in terms of Disney quality, budget and time. They're looking for the correct material, and they haven't found it yet," Radomski says.

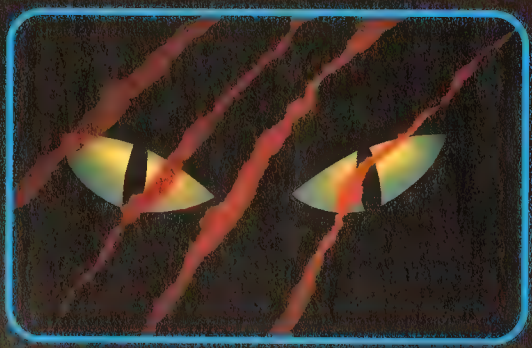
Meanwhile, *Batman*'s TV success has "blown open the doors" of opportunity for Radomski, as it has for his fellow co-producers, Bruce Timm, Alan Burnett and Paul Dini. "Before this, I was in this business because I liked to do art work. And now, people are looking at it and going, 'Hey, this is cool.' You've established yourself as somebody who knows what they're doing and can put out a decent product, and it gives you some credibility—people listen to you when you're trying to get a point across," Radomski says.

"I never knew I had many of the things in me that have emerged through the series," he says candidly. "I knew the basics and the technical end, but just being involved with a whole group of talented writers and great artists has made me a better artist, and I look at things with more open eyes."

He adds, "As far as my personal life, I'm pretty anonymous and I like to be that way. I have a wife and a son, and my time is *my time*. I'll work my butt off when I'm here, and I have taken work home, and thanks to my wife for being so understanding about that.

"But the interviews get old after awhile. You get sick of telling the same story. Who really cares about this? But I guess many people really *are* interested. It's not that I wanted to be famous. I just want to do my work.

"So," he explains, "that's why I feel strange accepting credit for establishing our style. It's true that I was the initial springboard, but without all the people who influenced this project, it wouldn't be what it is."



"Basically, we were *filmmakers*," reminds Radomski. "We weren't just making cartoons. We were doing these as individual little films."

Radomski's entry into showbiz is an example of what he calls "The Hollywood Story": Succeeding through perseverance, hard work, meeting helpful people and being at the right place at the right time.

"I had always wanted to get into animation," he says. "I'm from Cleveland, and there's not much animation in Cleveland, so I studied as an artist. I made three trips to California at about 19 or 20, and I was completely humiliated not being able to find work.

But Radomski had learned of another Cleveland native working in the Los Angeles area: actor/composer Will Ryan, who was doing voice work for Rick Reinert Productions on *Winnie the Pooh and a Day for Eeyore*. Will Ryan then introduced Radomski to director Dave Bennett, who introduced him to Reinert—who, as it happened, used to have his studio in Cleveland, and still had an ink-and-paint unit there, headed by Gretchen Heck and Bev Chiara. Radomski was given their telephone number. Back in Cleveland, he got an entry-level job with the unit.

"The *Pooh* film was my first big piece of animation work," he says. "I was just hand-inking and stripping cels. I learned everything from the bottom up, which was great. It was a priceless education."

While in Cleveland, Radomski also worked for Ennis McNulty and John Gibel, doing commercials for about two years, until Dave Bennett offered Radomski a job in L.A. For three-and-a-half years, Radomski assisted Bennett with storyboards and layouts, assisted Reinert with background painting and did some cel work. After leaving Reinert and freelancing for six months, Radomski joined Warner Bros. full-time. "I was going to make good money, and I could paint all day long. And that," Radomski says, "is exactly what I did."

After the first season of *Tiny Toons*, Radomski explains, "The studio had specific properties they wanted to develop: *Gremlins*, *The Griswolds* [based on the *National Lampoon's Vacation* characters], *Taz-Mania* and *Batmen*. I did samples for each proposed idea, just to have some part to do with a new show. Jean MacCurdy really liked my version of Gotham City. And Bruce Timm basically did a one-sheet Batman design, just a whole body shot and a couple of poses and head shots, and that's what we pitched."

MacCurdy asked Radomski and Timm to produce a two-minute promo piece, to test their capabilities and see how

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KNIGHT VISION

"It's true that I was the initial springboard [for our style], but without all the people who influenced this project, it wouldn't be what it is," maintains Radomski.

the show might look. Meanwhile, Warner Bros. provided backing for a full 65-episode *Batman* series. To Radomski's and Timm's surprise, MacCurdy appointed them as the show's producers. "Neither Bruce nor I had ever produced a series before, let alone 65 episodes, *let alone* such a high-profile property as *Batman*," Radomski says.

"When we did the promo, we talked about what we wanted to do. Bruce did the storyboards and the character designs, and I was doing the backgrounds. We knew where we stood right there. I knew I wasn't gonna sit down and draw characters; I just felt that I was more of an organizing-type person. I could gather people together, get the word out on what we wanted to do, and in the meantime, Bruce could start thinking about his version of Batman. I know the character, but I'm not necessarily this religious believer in the character. Bruce was more involved in the story and the acting performances. I was probably more in the technical, stylistic end, and getting things done on time as well as we could."

While Timm dictated the character style, Radomski designed the background style, starting with a black surface and then adding layers of light. "I laid in these big, flat areas of black and did the simple lighting on the buildings, and that was the springboard. Once they saw that it worked, everybody started going through their references of New York City, which has lots of older buildings. It's vintage detective. [Architect] Hugh Ferris was a great influence on the series. They brought in this art deco influence and then we went into *Mr. X* comics, saw the big, bold, simple designs and said, 'God, that's us, too.'"

Radomski credits Timm and background supervisor Ted Blackman with the art deco feel and the simplified graphic look. "The real benefit to that kind of working relationship is that, when you have as good a crew as we do, you allow a great deal of freedom. For the most part, everyone really had the same thinking on the show.

"Basically, we were filmmakers. We weren't just making cartoons. We were doing these as individual little films. I'm not sure most people understand the complexity of getting a film done, especially for animation. The process is just endless."

Although Radomski and Timm "jelled" as producers, they encountered difficulties with a story editor who felt the show needed a different direction. As a result, many early episodes were message-oriented and stressed "pro-social" values.

"Because of our lack of experience, management felt we needed somebody who had done some of this before," Radomski says. "We never had the same attitude toward what the series should be. It was [the story's editor's] opinion that it should be more pro-social, it could be violent and whatever we wanted it to be, but that doesn't mean Batman has to always have the episode's end quote and say, 'Kids, go up to your rooms and brush your teeth,' and all that crap.

"Batman's character motivation is simple—just do whatever it takes to get the point across. That doesn't mean lecturing or being a great philosopher about life. He just says you're doing wrong—*don't do it.*"

Another challenge was in convincing the writers to avoid the bane of TV animation: excessive dialogue. "Bruce and I always felt that way, completely separate from each other, that cartoons are *way* too chatty. You just want the characters to *shut up*. You don't need Batman talking throughout the whole episode. It's more interesting for him to walk into a darkened room, open up a file and let the audience read it, than for him to go, 'Hmmmm. I wonder what's in that file cabinet?'

"When you look back at some of the older cartoons, they did stuff *exactly*

This fall, the Caped Crusader hits the Saturday morning circuit in a re-titled format called *The Adventures of Batman & Robin.*

"We got away with plenty the first season," notes Radomski.

Hey, Joker! You've just been picked up for a second season by the Fox Network, and you've won at least two Emmys. What are you gonna do now?

KNIGHT VISION

like that, where a character is telegraphing everything he's going to do. How stupid! Batman doesn't need to do that. He's a detective. He doesn't need to give away all the information," Radomski says.

So, to trim excess dialogue and allow for more action, the producers wanted scripts in half the standard length for TV animation (one instead of two pages per screen minute) 50–30-page scripts instead of the normal 60. Writer-director relations also improved when veteran story editor Alan Burnett (CS#29) came on board as a producer.

"We really all had the same kind of approach in mind," Radomski says. "We didn't want it to be just action/adventure. We didn't want Batman to *always* be the hero. Let's not just have him go out and beat up the bad guys and he's always the winner. That's no fun. Let's really get some heart and soul into this thing and make these characters come to *life*, instead of just doing another merchandisable episodic series. We wanted them to be dramatic mini-features."

Because of the hectic production schedule, Radomski and Timm were pushed into directing episodes themselves. This became Radomski's first foray as a director.

"The studio wasn't very interested in hiring another director to pick up those extra seven shows. So, Bruce and I said we would do them, and we just basically added them to our normal workload. But it's fun to take something from a script stage and make it your own," he says.

"I would have *loved* to have done a whole bunch more, but it was way too burdensome once we started mid-production on the series. We were getting shows every week and having to edit and retake, and then mixing finished shows and still doing pre-production on others. It was a killer, but fun at the same time. I would love to be able to focus either on producing or directing. Doing both at the same time on a big series like this one, you never feel like you're doing your best."

"We did pretty much everything we *wanted* to do for the film," says Radomski, pointing to Bruce Wayne's on-screen romance.

Radomski cites his influences as "everything from *Little Rascals* to *Outer Limits* and *The Godfather*, which had this great impact on me when I was 11 or 12. But even with those things in mind, I always try and approach things fresh. I don't want to come in and say, 'Well, use this shot from this movie.' I just try and do whatever the script influences me to do."

Regarding his first episode, "If You're So Smart, Why Aren't You Rich?" Radomski says, "It came off OK. I didn't like the script by David Wise at all. I still don't. I hated the title. I *tried* my hardest to get it changed, but Alan Burnett wouldn't budge.

"We just couldn't convince the writers that the Riddler might set something up as simple as a bomb in somebody's office. It had to be complicated. So, that posed a real problem because you have 22 minutes to establish the character, and they suddenly put in these complex riddles that Batman must figure out. And, of course, he immediately figures them out, and that destroys the whole mystery of Batman as a detective, because all he does is think for a minute and he has the answer. That really didn't work for me, but I did the best I could with it.

"I had fun with it and unfortunately, we were trying out a studio in Spain—La Piz Azul—and that was their first [and last] episode. So, it comes off real cartoony compared to other episodes. It was fun to do, but not one of my favorites.

"And I don't care for the Riddler a whole lot. If there was an opportunity to work with him again, and I had complete say over that character, I would treat the Riddler as we do the Joker, where in reality he's a mean bastard. He uses his wit, but it's not the main thing he relies on, which is his ability to dominate."

With Paul Dini's "Almost Got 'Im" (in which various Bat-villains explain how they almost destroyed the Dark Knight), Radomski had better results. "It played well, which I was happy about. The dialogue is really snappy. Paul did a great job in the transitions as far as writing. Each character has his unique dialogue which really sells the story and keeps you involved. You never get confused."

All Batman characters & Art: ©Warner & ©copyright 1995, 1996 DC Comics Inc.

Then came "Mudslide," the final appearance of Clayface. Radomski describes this episode as "a *blast* to do. We had written 50 scripts so far, and everybody was running out of ideas. Alan came up with this idea about Matt Hagen: The chemicals are wearing thin and he's basically dying. This woman comes into his life and tries to help him because she has been in love with him since his early days in the movies. And then when Alan started talking about *really* using Clayface for what animation could do with him, I just got so excited. I couldn't wait to work on it.

"Clayface ends up consuming Batman within his body, and he's gonna kill him, and Batman uses the grappling hook to blow his head off. It was just a *beautiful* opportunity to really get extreme in what we wanted to do with it, because Clayface was a big monster. We didn't have as much problem with the network saying, 'Well, you can't do that 'cause this is a human being.' It looked like a big flabby mass of goo on the storyboards, so the network never got too crazy about it. We ended up killing him at the end. Basically, he melts in the ocean. He disintegrates and he's dead."

The twist is that Batman is actually the story's antagonist, because he prevents Clayface from becoming normal. "We thought that Batman is a real bastard in the episode, but he has a couple of lines where he has made an effort to save Clayface, and if he doesn't want to be saved, Batman can't let him go on, because he's gonna hurt somebody some day. That's the justification," Radomski says.

"But it was a whole lot of fun to do, an opportunity to take complete advantage of animation. You buy the fact that Batman's gonna die inside this guy. You think he's suffocating and he's really gasping for his life. It does get pretty intense. You don't see stuff like that done all the time on television."

As it turned out, studio junio animated "Mudslide," not TMS, which had animated "Feat of Clay, Part 2," and chose to pass on further *Batman* assignments to work on *Animaniacs* instead. "We had six or seven studios at one time working on the show," Radomski notes. "Die-hard fans can tell the difference; we can definitely tell the difference, but I don't think the general viewing public notices.

"We've had a couple of studios [Akom, Sunrise] that we've had to dump after awhile because it was just a consistent problem getting what we wanted and having to fight over it and not seeing anything get any better. We had to do some shuffling as to where we were going to get the best production done, and we just managed to get through it somehow.

"It would be nice to be able to get production back in the States, but I don't know when that will happen, as far as television goes, because it's just too expensive to do it here. Eventually, I would like to think that we'll get to a point where things will even out and we can train more people and do more of the animation here.

"But for the time being, we must learn how to work with the overseas studios, and help them to understand our culture more," Radomski says. "I think that's why many Japanese films never really made it here. There has never been an animated film that has done close to what Disney films do. It's a whole different kind of storytelling and approach to films, and people just look at them and go, 'God, this is a really long and boring story.'

"I don't know if we would have done the *Batman* film the same way for a Japanese audience. There's a Warner Bros. division in Tokyo that distributes films internationally, and they ran the series there, and for the first few months, the network took surveys and found that the kids liked it because it was animated and they thought it was kind of cool, but they didn't quite understand what Batman was. They're not able to relate to this vigilante—is he a good guy or a bad guy? They didn't know.

"Americans would think, 'Well,

(continued on page 60)

The *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm* feature film was an exciting experience for Radomski. It gave him license to push Batman beyond broadcast limits.

Blurring the line between the creator-owned Bravura imprint and Malibu's Ultraverse is Walt Simonson, here teaming his *Star Slammers* with Warstrike.

SLAMMERS

Walt Simonson's star-spanning mercenaries return. For fun & profit.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

When you have some stars that need slamming, there's only one group to hire. After more than a dozen years, the original men who could out-shoot, out-fight and out-kill anybody have returned from intergalactic limbo. The Star Slammers are back in a new five-issue limited series from Bravura. And, creator Walt Simonson couldn't be happier.

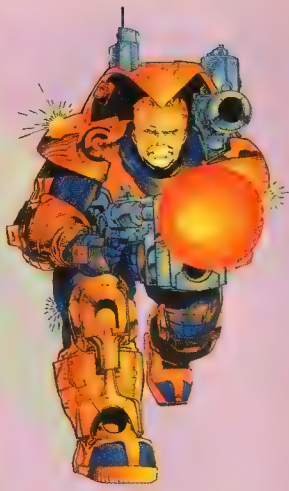
"Malibu was looking for creator-owned properties, and I was looking for a place to do them," Simonson notes. "*Star Slammers* has been a back-story project of mine on and off for a long time. The original *Slammers* came out about 1970 in a fan publication, and the Marvel graphic novel came out around 1982. I seem to do them every 12 years!"

The new *Star Slammers* series won't involve the entire group, and takes place long after the Marvel graphic novel. "The Star Slammers, as a concept, are really a whole planetful of mercenary soldiers, who kick ass and take names for bucks," he says. "They do it with a martial sense of honor, but of necessity, it makes them good guys or bad guys in the eyes of other people, depending on what they're doing and who they're working for. But, I feel that telling a story about a planetful of people isn't that involving. What I've tried to do in the graphic novel and the new series is focus in on a limited number of characters, rather than cover the whole shebang. In this case, I've focused in on one character, one Star Slammer, who's really the story's protagonist."

A Slammer called Rojas is the star of this new series, *The Minoan Agenda*. "In the first issue, the Slammers have gone out on a small strike-and-destroy mission. One of them, Rojas, is captured by the enemy, unknown to the rest of the Slammers, and left behind when they depart. The story in the five-issue series is really Rojas'

Photo: Maureen McTigue

Always on the vanguard of the comics industry, Simonson and friends formed Bravura to keep control of their creations.



"Rojas is the first Star Slammer to be taken alive by the other side," says Simonson. "That's why this story is important."

"The Star Slammers are a whole planetful of mercenary soldiers who kick ass and take names for bucks," relates Simonson.

All Star Slammers Art: Walter Simonson Courtesy Malibu
WarStrike Character: Copyright 1994 Malibu Comics Entertainment, Inc.

Rojas is the Star Slammer at the center of *The Minoan Agenda*, Simonson's five-part limited series.

story. In fact, when the series opens, he has already been captured and we see what happened to him in flashback. He's being hauled back to the major planet of this small galactic empire to stand trial and be executed. Naturally, when he wakes up, he's not too happy, so the main story is Rojas among the enemy, and his fate as he tries to escape. At the same time, within the empire itself, there are warring political factions, and Rojas' presence in this climate acts as a catalyst for revolt within the empire itself, so there are other characters who come into play with their own concerns for and against the government. And, they get involved with Rojas' story as well."

Simonson says he's attempting an adventure story that has more than one level. "I'm trying to create a story that will be a fairly complex slam-bang action tale involving political intrigue," he explains. "There are a series of characters—Rojas is the only real Slammer involved, but he's at the center of it all. Each of the characters around him have their own agendas as far as what Rojas represents or how he can be used. The mini-series is named *The Minoan Agenda* because the ancient Cretan civilization was the model for the culture of this minor galactic empire—these guys are really just on the rim of the known galaxy. It's not a hi-tech place. That's one of the reasons Rojas was captured. The Slammers were doing this strike a long way from anywhere, and no one expected to run into the difficulties they encountered. Rojas is the first Star Slammer to be taken alive by the other side, so that's why this particular story is important."

"I'm trying to create a story that will be a fairly complex, slam-bang action tale involving political intrigue," Simonson states.

All Star Slammers Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Walter Simonson

Simonson has had the *Star Slammers* in the back of his mind for 25 years. "I originally created them in 1969, when they were called the 'Spaceslammers,' though I never published them under that name. I did do a five-page story at that time, but I changed the name. I created them because I belonged to the Washington Science Fiction Association, or WSFA. They were bidding to have the World Con in Washington, D.C. in 1974, so we campaigned to promote our city. The *Star Slammers* actually began as a promotional strip to persuade fans that D.C. in '74 would be a good idea. They got the bid, so I take complete credit!" he laughs.

"At the time, I was in the science fiction club and reading a lot of SF, and I really liked Cordwainer Smith and Robert Heinlein, both of whom had done a series of stories that ran along a very long timeline. Smith had done *The Instrumentality of Mankind* stories, which run over thousands of years, and Heinlein wrote the 'Future History' stories. I've always had a fascination with the idea of doing stories that would be set against a common background running for a long time. I wouldn't actually have to sit down and do a history of the entire universe, from A-to-Z, and cover thousands of years, but I have stories that occur along the timeline and illuminate critical moments in that timeline."

Simonson explains that his approach to this SF series is far different from that of a standard superhero comic book. "It's not particularly commercial in terms of ordinary comics—I wouldn't be able to go in and do *Thor* or *Fantastic Four* stories spanning thousands of years with different characters," he says. "It couldn't work that way. There wasn't an opportunity to go in that direction,

Design & Layout: Calvin Lo

until more recently. At the same time, I like the Moebius *Lt. Blueberry* books, with a whole series of volumes that cover the life of this particular adventurer. By the time I'm done doing this stuff, I wouldn't mind having a whole series of graphic novels that would tell the life story of the Star Slammers, as opposed to the life of a single individual like Blueberry. The Marvel graphic novel was a partial origin story of the Star Slammers. The story I'm doing now would take place 1,000 years later, when they're really quite a force in the galaxy."

Simonson is one of Bravura's founders, but he says this creator-owned imprint actually came about naturally. "Bravura happened almost organically," he explains. "A number of people who wanted to do creator-owned projects all approached Dave Olbrich at Malibu at about the same time. Jim Starlin, Howard Chaykin, Steven Grant, Gil Kane, even those young guys like Dan Brereton and Dan Jurgens, we all knew each other. Starlin and Chaykin and I go all the way back to the beginning of our careers in the early '70s. Once we all began showing up at the gate at about the same time, it seemed a very logical step to get together, chew the fat a bit and try and put together some sort of imprint, some place where we could all play together in the same house, doing the stuff we wanted to do by ourselves but share the same sandbox. It would give all of us a little more weight in the marketplace at a time when there's so much product out there."

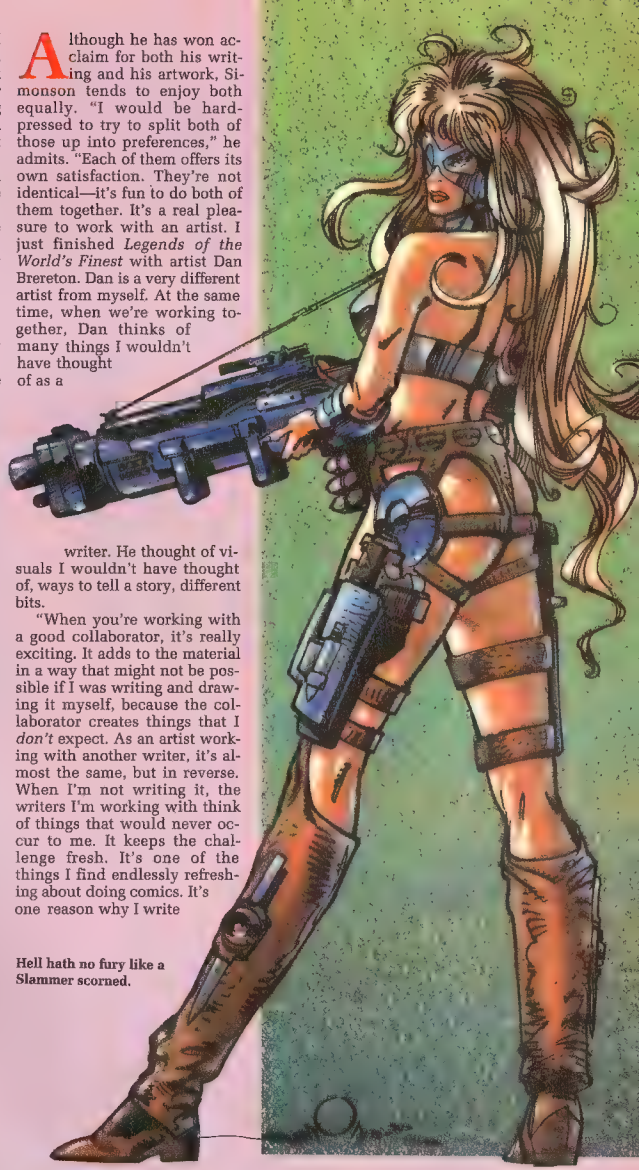
Simonson has always owned the copyright to *Star Slammers*. "It was something that I didn't want to do for somebody else and give up the rights," he declares. "It's one of the reasons I went with Bravura. I was looking at companies interested in publishing creator-owned material and who would do a good job with it. I also got offered a very good deal, one that was impossible to turn down."

He laughingly admits that once more in his career, he's being looked at as "that new guy Simonson," but he's not doing anything different to adapt the story for another generation of readers.

"There's nothing in the five issues that's predicated on readers being familiar with the previous history of the Slammers. As much of the history of the Slammers as there is for me, there's very little for the general readers, aside from that Marvel graphic novel. I'm not doing it in a way that would presuppose that the reader has to know about the Star Slammers. All the stuff that you would *need* to know about them or what they do is in this five-issue series."

Although he has won acclaim for both his writing and his artwork, Simonson tends to enjoy both equally. "I would be hard-pressed to try to split both of those up into preferences," he admits. "Each of them offers its own satisfaction. They're not identical—it's fun to do both of them together. It's a real pleasure to work with an artist. I just finished *Legends of the World's Finest* with artist Dan Brereton. Dan is a very different artist from myself. At the same time, when we're working together, Dan thinks of many things I wouldn't have thought of as a writer. He thought of visuals I wouldn't have thought of, ways to tell a story, different bits.

"When you're working with a good collaborator, it's really exciting. It adds to the material in a way that might not be possible if I was writing and drawing it myself, because the collaborator creates things that I *don't* expect. As an artist working with another writer, it's almost the same, but in reverse. When I'm not writing it, the writers I'm working with think of things that would never occur to me. It keeps the challenge fresh. It's one of the things I find endlessly refreshing about doing comics. It's one reason why I write some stuff, I draw some stuff, I write and draw some stuff, because each of them offers a somewhat different satisfaction. That means I'm able to enjoy the work I am doing."



Hell hath no fury like a Slammer scorned.

Simonson is devoting almost all of his time to finishing *Star Slammers*, now that he has cleared up several other projects. "I've actually turned down quite a bit of work in the past several months, because I had odd jobs

(continued on page 62)

THE LEGEND OF HELLBOY

All Hellboy Art: Courtesy Dark Horse Comics All Hellboy Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Mike Mignola

Photo: Courtesy Mike Mignola

"Who the hell is he?" is the reaction that self-deprecating artist Mike Mignola says he expects when associating with Legend-mates like John Byrne and Frank Miller.

With his first solo creation, Mike Mignola goes all out for monsters.

By DARCY SULLIVAN

It's the witching hour in New York City, and Mike Mignola is draping cloaks of ink over the demons, monsters and other nightmares lurking on his drawing board. The page gradually gets darker, as if from a gathering of shadows. *Hellboy* is taking shape, but excited as Mignola is, he's troubled by one question: Will anyone buy this?

Probably every comics professional making the switch to creator-owned comics—where your paycheck hinges on sales—wonders the same thing. But unlike some, Mignola, a founding member of Dark Horse's new creator-owned Legend imprint, hasn't hedged his bets.

"I didn't go, 'This is what the fans want, and I'm going to give it to them,'" he says. "I didn't set out to make up my version of Wolverine or the Punisher. *Hellboy* is a very unique book."

"Unique" sits perilously close to "unknown" in the dictionary, and in Mignola's own career. He earned his fame with notable sellers like *Cosmic Odyssey*, *Gotham by Gaslight* and *Wolverine: Jungle Adventure*, and spent it on "unique" works like *Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser* and *Ironwolf*, two labors of love that buyers spurned.

After a decade of project jumping, Mignola's ready to settle down now, in his life and his work. His wife's expecting a baby girl this month, and he would like to do some long-term slogging on *Hellboy*. And he will—provided comics fans still have a taste for good old capital-M Monsters.

Because that's what becomes *this* Legend most. As Mignola notes, "Even if I'm drawing an issue that's low on monsters, I've always got one, because the lead guy *is* a monster."

"He's a clunky, Jack Kirby-inspired, thuggish, big, monstery kind of guy." Mignola is piling the adjectives onto Hellboy, whose horns, tail, hooves and red skin certainly show where he got his name. Connected somehow with Nazi activities at World War II's end, Hellboy showed up as a child in postwar England, was raised by the Americans and British and has come to accept his place in our society. He even shaved off his horns, Mignola says, "so he could wear hats if he wanted to."

The big red lug first appeared (not counting last year's *San Diego Comic Con Comic*) on the cover of *John Byrne's Next Men: Faith* #3, looking ominous as, pardon the expression, all hell. But don't judge this behemoth by his scowl: "He's not one of those evil, bitter characters," says Mignola. "He's a really nice guy. He's kind of like [Legend colleague Paul Chadwick's] Concrete, if Concrete got in more fights."

Those fights come with the territory when you're "the world's greatest paranormal investigator." That's not exactly the same thing as a monster hunter, says Mignola, dismissing comparisons with Michael T. Gilbert's Mr. Monster (CS #10).

"*Hellboy* is a bit more...cerebral than that," says Mignola, who instantly

catches himself. "That sounds weird, talking about Kirby-style monsters and then saying it's 'cerebral.' But this isn't a guy kicking in the door, shooting off guns and shouting, 'I hate monsters!' When I do vampires, it won't be to see how big a stake I can drive through them."

Rather, Mignola says he'll try to conjure up the eeriness of myths and legends, "like the British folk tales about dragons, sea serpents and cannibal hags who live in oak trees." That said, you could ransack Anglo-Saxon folklore and not find a mention of the beasties in the *Hellboy* premiere story, "Seed of Destruction": *vampire frogs.*

"People keep bringing them up," Mignola sighs. "I *should* have come up with a more serious-sounding villain to start with. What happens is there are these froggish creatures that suck the juice out of people. It's not as silly as it seems—it's not like *Howard the Duck*, where a *cow* was a vampire."

To satisfy his short attention span, Mignola has created a concept he says could wander from moldering mausoleums to Old West ghost towns with just a lurch through a dimensional window. Multiple dimensions also play a role in *Hellboy*'s back-up stories by Art Adams, featuring Monkeyman and O'Brien, who will probably come across Hellboy before long.

Mignola says he has 15 years' worth of plots in his head, but being a novice writer, he hired a more experienced scripter. The job went to John Byrne, Mignola's partner on comics like DC's *World of Krypton*. "He's really great at writing good, solid comics," says Mignola. "I'm afraid that if I wrote *Hellboy*, it would be so weird it wouldn't make any sense."

Byrne is more than *Hellboy*'s wordsmith. He's also one of Legend's two head honchos, Frank Miller being the other. These two writer/artists shaped the new imprint out of a group of artists who wanted to create and own their own comics. The idea had been floating around the Legendaires' heads since 1992, when the group was called Dinosaur and included Walt Simonson and Chris Claremont.

Mignola himself designed the Legend logo, an Easter Island head, from a suggestion by Byrne. "When you see it," Mignola says, "you can expect quality. The major difference between us and Image is, you're going to get a John Byrne comic or a Frank Miller comic. We're *not* going to have a lot of people who are kind of like us doing the comic.

"Also, every one of us is interested

...SHE MYSELF ENOUGH IN THE EAST... HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN?
TEN MONTHS YOU SAID? TEN MONTHS OF MY LIFE I JUST...
...CAN'T REMEMBER...
...SIR?
...SIR...
...SIR... YOU'VE GOT FROGS...

All Art: Mike Mignola

"He's a clunky, Jack Kirby-inspired, thuggish, big, monstery kind of guy," says Mignola of Hellboy.

Mignola returns to illustrating classic horror movies on the *Bride of Frankenstein* cards for Topps' Universal Monsters Series.

"I wanted a reputation for mood stuff," says Mignola, whose bold, dark style has made him a much sought-after cover artist.

Art: Copyright 1991 Universal City Studios Inc.
All Batman, Clayface & Related Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1990, 1994 DC Comics Inc.

in telling stories. If you want comics that don't have stories, that are just splash pages and fight scenes, Legend is *not* for you."

The downside of the Legend moniker is that it invites fans to believe that the creators are describing *themselves* as legends. Mignola, for one, would feel pretty silly doing that. He jokes that when people run through the Legend roster—Miller, Byrne, Adams, Chadwick, Dave Gibbons, Geof Darrow—"and they get to Mike Mignola, they either go, 'Who the hell's he?' or 'What the hell's he doing with *those* guys?' "

***Hellboy*'s premiere story, "Seeds of Destruction," pits "the world's greatest paranormal investigator" against the menace of...vampire frogs.**

This kind of self-deprecating humor comes easily to Mignola, who says his distinctive technique of swathing figures in black began as a way "to cover up stuff I didn't know how to draw."

In fact, his style developed after artist Rick Bryant told the young Mignola at a late '70s comic convention that he should learn to "spot blacks"—to place black areas in a composition to give it weight and depth. Mignola, an ardent fan of Frank Frazetta, returned to his hero's work to study from a master. "I looked to see how much of the characters he drew, and how much he didn't," says Mignola. "I saw how effective it was not to see all of a figure."

Few comics artists spot blacks as enthusiastically as Mignola. In fact, what he does might actually be described as spotting whites.

"When I work, I think of everything as black," he says. "I often draw a figure first as a silhouette, then fill in what we need to see. Someone like Batman works great as a silhouette—all you need to see are the ears, the cape, maybe the ridged gloves. The less you see, the better."

Emphasizing shape and design, Mignola avoids the fussy little lines that virtually define fan-favorite comics art. His work has its imitators, including current Marvel artist Tom Grindberg. "He did Neal Adams for years, and then he started to do me," Mignola says. "At first he was horrible, but now he has gotten to the point where I like what he's doing."

Flattering copies aside, Mignola knows that true superstar status is still several zillion itsy-bitsy scribbles away. "At one point, Joe Quesada was really influenced by me," Mignola relates. "He came over one day to show me some X-Men stuff he had done. It was a nice job, but he had these little lines all over everything. I said, 'Those lines aren't doing anything, they're just stuck on there—why don't you get rid of them?' He said, 'No, I'm doing the *commercial* Mike Mignola!' "

It's a testament to Mignola's talent that he and his against-the-grain style are in such demand. He has become a

cover artist *par excellence*, his bold work fronting dozens of comics by other artists.

Typically, Mignola shrugs off his cover work, saying he got so many jobs because he was around the DC and Marvel offices and could complete a cover in a day or two. That's also, he says, how he got started in comics as an inker circa 1983—by being around, not by being good.

"I was horrible," he insists. "My first job was inking five pages of *The Defenders* #116—I saw it recently and it was even worse than I remembered. I ruined [penciller] Don Perlin's stuff, I slaughtered him."

The inking dried up when, after a year or so of laboring on other people's pages, Mignola moved out west. Says Mignola, "I'm sure someone at Marvel said, 'This guy sucks! Why are we sending stuff to California to be inked when there are guys hanging around our lobby who are better?' "

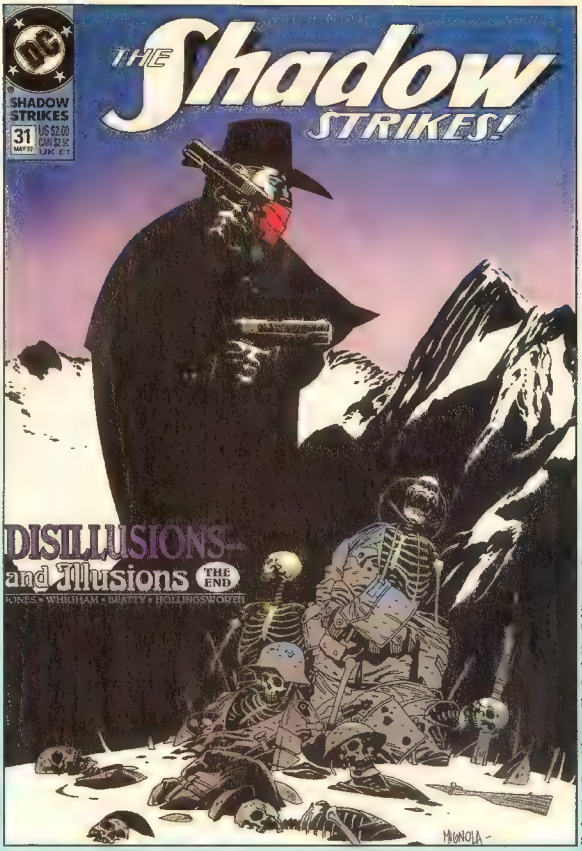
At least one believer at Marvel was editor Al Milgrom, who strong-armed Mignola into pencilling a Sub-Mariner story that ran in *Marvel Fanfare* #16. More Marvel artwork followed over the next few years: a couple of *Vision and Scarlet Witch* issues ("Just hideous"), *Rocket Raccoon* (a funny-animals book) and issues of *Hulk* and *Alpha Flight*.

Mignola says he really started to grow during an adaptation of Michael Moorcock's *Chronicles of Corum* with writer Mike Baron for First Comics. He brought more of his influences to the fore, from Frazetta and Berni Wrightson to non-comics illustrators like Arthur Rackham, Edmund Dulac and N. C. Wyeth.

In 1987, Mignola got together with DC for a *Phantom Stranger* mini-series. Then came his breakthrough: an all-star DC superhero pajama party called *Cosmic Odyssey*, written by Jim Starlin. "I'm not happy with 99 percent of it," Mignola says, "but it's where I started to draw in my current style."

That brought a host of superhero books his way, much to Mignola's chagrin. "I didn't want to be known as a superhero artist," he recalls. "I wanted a reputation for *mood* stuff, but I hadn't really done any."

So, he bit at 1989's *Gotham by Gaslight*, the first "Elseworlds" Batman book (CS #21), determined to turn it into a Gothic showcase. "I knew *Gotham by Gaslight* would be a pain in the butt, because I would have to research the period, the costumes, what an old Gotham City would look like—I can't fake stuff," he says. "But it got people to say, 'Oh, look, he's the guy who does fog and Jack the Ripper.' "



Shadow Art: Copyright 1992 The Conde Nast Publications, Inc.

Beginning with black and deftly placing areas of white, Mignola has developed a drawing style exactly the opposite of most artists.

Disappointment followed Mignola's commercial successes with *Gotham*, a Dr. Doom/Dr. Strange graphic novel and *Wolverine: The Jungle Adventure*. He lavished attention on two of his favorite projects: the 1990-91 Epic series *Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser* and 1992's *Ironwolf*, a DC graphic novel. Both were swashbuckling romps written by Howard Chaykin that failed to find their audience.

"People were saying, 'Mike Mignola must be dead, because he sure hasn't done anything in a while,' " the artist says. "No, I was doing 300 pages of material that most people *never* saw.

"It's upsetting to me that Marvel didn't reprint *Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser* as a trade paperback. We did a great job. They could have said, 'Here's something for the bookstore audience.' But if it isn't doing numbers, Marvel doesn't want to touch it."

Ironwolf, on the other hand, may have remained obscure precisely *because* it was a pricey book, without the wave of publicity needed to make fans ante up. Says Mignola, "It surprises me that DC would make something a $30 trade hardback and do everything they could to keep it a secret.

"I took a month off beforehand to design costumes, spaceships, planets, insignia, architecture. I designed tons of stuff that never made its way into the book. Chaykin said it looked like I was doing a movie, I had done so much pre-production work. It would have been nice if it had paid off, but it didn't."

Mignola had no problem rebounding into the mainstream. In 1993, he drew and plotted *Legends of the Dark*

Dracula Art: Copyright 1992 Columbia Pictures Industries Inc./Courtesy Topps

Mignola's work on the Topps comic adaptation of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* led him to storyboard a new opening scene for director Francis Ford Coppola.

HOURS LATER... IN A NEARBY ART MUSEUM...
HELP! A LION IS HERE!
RUN FROM THE LION!
HEH, HEH, I'M NOT REALLY A LION! I'M CLAY-FACE!
NOW THAT THEY'RE GONE, I'LL SWIPE SOME FINE ART. YEAH!
THE SHOUTS OF FLEEING ART PATRONS BRING BATMAN AND ROBIN!
SHHH, ROBIN. WE'VE GOT TO TRY TRAPPING HIM. HE'S NEAR THAT CLOSET DOOR.
GOT YOU!
HMMM. HERE'S A NICE ONE.
WALTER KEANE, I THINK.
5

Pencil Art: Courtesy Mike Mignola

His reputation as a hot Bat-artist couldn't save the humorous Clayface origin story that Mignola and Steve Purcell did for *Secret Origins* from being rejected.

Knight #54, an H.P. Lovecraft-flavored comic he calls "the one job that I'm still happy with." He also worked from a Dave Gibbons script on *ALIENS: Salvation*, thinking all the while about the Gibbonsesque details he was leaving out: "Dave would have drawn every button. That's not what I do. I have to make it all black."

And then there's *Dracula*, a four-issue adaptation for Topps of the Francis Ford Coppola film. While capturing the actors' likenesses was a hit-or-miss affair—"There are maybe two places in the book where, purely by accident, the Winona Ryder character looks like her"—the project did yield what the artist describes as "the weirdest night of my life."

"Coppola called me," Mignola explains, "and said, 'Come up and see the picture.' I figured there would be a lot of studio people there—but it was just me, Coppola and George Lucas. We had dinner, watched a rough cut of the movie, and they argued over what changes to make.

"As a result, a couple of days later, I storyboarded four new sequences for the movie, including the scene in a chapel at the very beginning when Vlad goes off to war. That was one of George Lucas' suggestions—the film had started with a battle, and the first time you saw Vlad's wife she was dead. He said we should see them together.

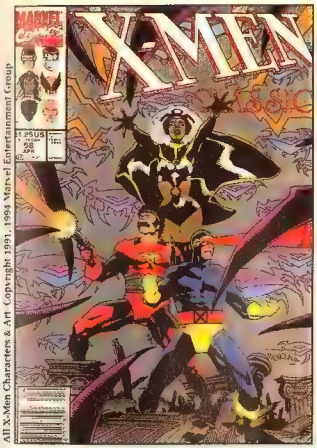
"I didn't know they had used that chapel scene. Then, when I saw the finished film at the theater, it started with Gary Oldman, Winona Ryder and Anthony Hopkins [as the priest] standing *where I told Coppola they should stand*. It was frame-for-frame what I had done. I thought, 'This is not a very professional movie if *I* had something to do with it.' "

It's easy to think Mignola should stop needling himself, cut himself some slack and quit worrying about *Hellboy*'s bankability. But his career has had its disappointments, the kinds of moments when the Mignola name just didn't have Legendary clout. *Fafhrd* and *Ironwolf* are two examples.

Another involves Mignola's lost Batman story. Now, this is the *Gotham by Gaslight* guy, the artist drafted for prestige covers like *Batman & Judge Dredd: Judgment in Gotham*. Mignola even helped design the Riddler and Mr. Freeze for Fox's *Batman* animated series: "They kept saying, 'Make up some bad guys, we need everybody,' " he relates.

But his Bat-reputation didn't help him salvage the origin of Clayface from DC's "thanks but no thanks" drawer. The reason you'll probably never read it is—holy image problems!—it makes Batman look dopey.

It seems Mignola was loitering in



All X-Men Characters & Art Copyright 1991, 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group

Mignola had several *X-Men* projects lined up which got deep-sixed after his fall-out with Marvel.

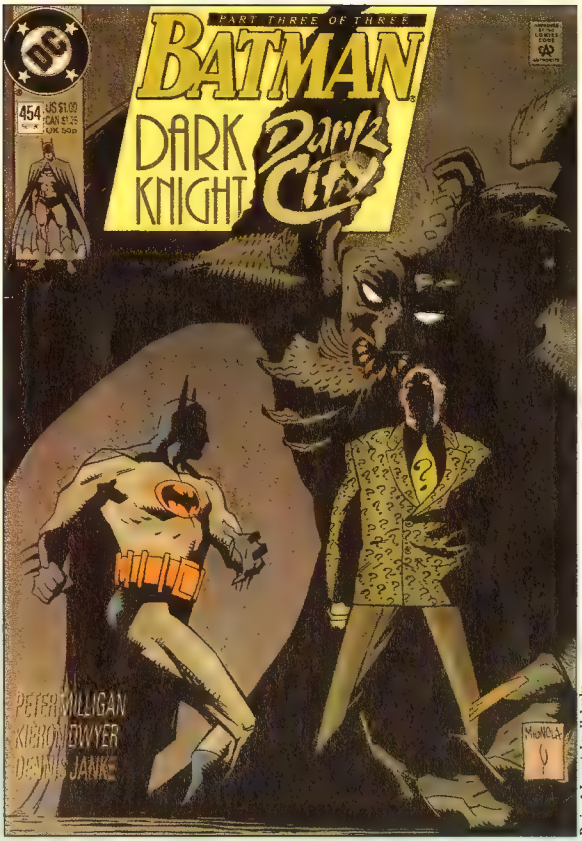
the DC offices, being tempted by the editor of *Secret Origins* to do an origin story. That's when he found the old origin of Clayface, from *Detective Comics* #40: "It's so stupid it's hilarious. I said, 'I'll do it, if I can do it like *this*.' "

Mignola collaborated with his buddy and *Sam & Max* creator Steve Purcell. Here's a sample bit of dialogue, from when Clayface first tests his powers: "Wow! I can change from man to elephant to speedboat and now I'm a giant, self-propelled, twitching spine! What could be more horrible?"

"We just went nuts with it," says Purcell. "It seemed like DC didn't care if it was serious or not."

Oops. The book's editor, Mignola says, hadn't checked with *Batman* editor Denny O'Neil, who was propagating the grimmer Dark Knight version of the hero. "Supposedly when the story came in, all the other editors were laughing at it," Purcell says, "except for O'Neil." (Oddly enough, *Secret Origins* #44 featured a silly—but far less funny—version of the same Clayface origin by a different team.)

In addition, you'll probably never see these Marvel comics: Mignola's Wolverine/Cable/Fantastic Four story with writer Larry Hama, and the Wolverine/Cable book plotted and inked by Mignola, pencilled by Art Adams. Don't get excited, X-fans, these books don't even exist. They were casualties of Mignola's falling out with Marvel over, of all things, a cover. Specifically, the cover to *X-Force* #8, a fill-in issue drawn by Mignola, with two framing pages by Rob Liefeld.



Design & Layout: Len H. Leake

Best known for his superhero work, Mignola laments the lack of attention given to his low-profile favorites *Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser* and *Iron Wolf*.

Liefeld had just jumped to the top of Marvel's nasty list by announcing he was leaving to form Image. Mignola says he got the editor's OK to do the cover, but couldn't get a deadline pinned down. He found out why when he walked into the Marvel offices and saw Liefeld's cover ready to print.

The problem wasn't the cover, Mignola says, but the way the editor handled the whole thing. "I said, 'Here I am lined up to do two X-Men projects and you guys can't be straight with me about a cover? Rob's gone, he's never coming back, and you have to lie to me to kiss *his* ass?' That showed my value to Marvel."

Difficult editors will be a thing of the past if *Hellboy* takes off. But Mignola's not burning his bridges yet. He recently completed the *Bride of Frankenstein* cards for Topps' Universal Monsters Illustrated set. He's working on this year's Superman annual covers. And he has set up a "wait and see" schedule for Hellboy: a four-issue mini-series, a pause to assess it, a *Monkeyman and O'Brien* mini-series with Hellboy back-up stories, and then....

And then? Reader response will determine whether Mignola heads for a hush-hush Plan B at DC or keeps the monsters stompin'. "Saleswise, I'm desperately hoping *Hellboy* isn't *Ironwolf II*," says Mike Mignola. "I want to do a regular series, and there's nothing at DC or Marvel that seems like it would be fun to do forever. *Hellboy* would be fun to do forever."

Photo: Kim Howard Johnson

MAN & HAWKMAN

After all those years drawing comics, Sheldon Moldoff never dreamed he had fans.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Many comics fans today are still unfamiliar with the long, noteworthy career of Sheldon Moldoff, but his accomplishments in the field speak for themselves.

Though he may be best known for drawing the original *Hawkman* in comics' Golden Age, Moldoff was also one of Bob Kane's first assistants on *Batman*. While pencilling many of DC's classic Golden Age covers, Moldoff drew the classic cover for *All-American* #16, featuring the very first appearance of Green Lantern. In the late '40s, he may have been responsible for William Gaines' launching of the E.C. horror line.

When Moldoff returned to pencil—uncredited—hundreds of *Batman* stories in the '50s and '60s, he designed and drew the first appearances of Batwoman, Bat-Mite and many of Batman's most popular villains. And even though he's officially retired, Moldoff still keeps busy drawing today. Although he never had any formal art schooling, Moldoff did receive encouragement from another name familiar to longtime comics fans while he was growing up in New York. "I started drawing Popeye and Betty Boop on the sidewalks of New York, and a fellow who lived in my building asked if I would like to learn how to draw cartoons," he says. "We sat down on a bench, and he showed me how to start with circles and draw heads, and said when I had finished some of them to bring them to his apartment upstairs. That fellow was Bernard Baily [the first artist of *The Spectre*]. We became friends, though he was years older than me at the time—he was graduating high school, while I was just finishing public [elementary] school! Every few months I would bring him drawings to criticize. Then, he moved out of my building, and I didn't see him again for many years, until I bumped into him at National Periodicals [as DC was then known]. He was a very good artist, a good friend, and he kicked me off in the business."

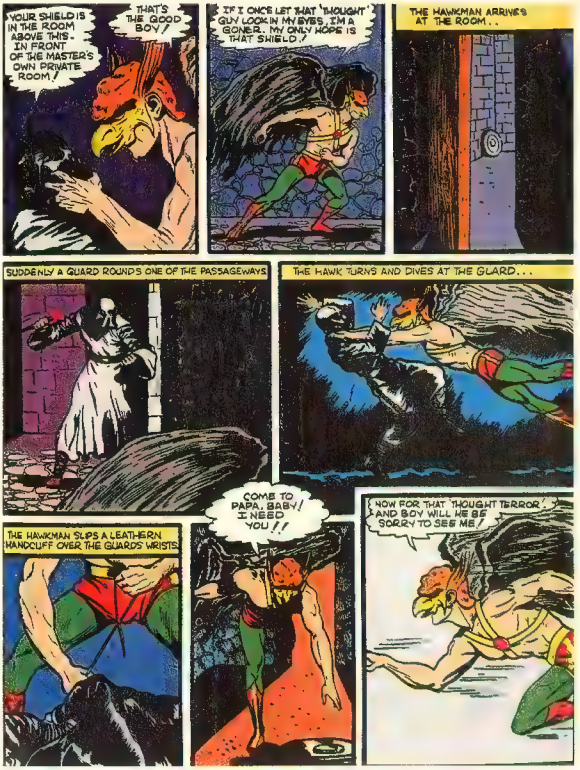
Moldoff's first job in comics was doing backgrounds and lettering for Bob Kane's studio, which was producing *Batman* for DC. "*Batman* had just started, and [Kane's] father and mother would bring the pages back and forth to me," he says. "His father wanted me to stay with Bob, and he was a little upset when I left. He said, 'You two fellows should open a studio of your own, because you've got talent, and this is going to be a big field.' He

was right, but unfortunately, he died very young."

According to Moldoff, Kane's father had enough business savvy to choose a course of action when the rights to Batman came in question. "When Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster sued over *Superman*, Bob's father said, 'We're not suing anyone.' I'm going to go down and see [DC publisher] Jack Liebowitz and we're going to work out a contract.' He went down there and said, 'Bob has a great strip, he's a great talent. What we want is a guarantee of work, that's all.' And that's how Bob Kane's contract evolved. He was assured of a certain amount of pages per year. And that went on, it was renewed at different periods, and Bob's name always had to appear on the strip as part of the deal. But he doesn't own anything. They worked out a gentleman's agreement."

The most important part of the deal may have been the guarantee of work. Kane's studio was certain of having enough to keep them busy, but his employees—including Moldoff—had to give up any recognition. "I know when I ghosted for him, he was guaranteed a minimum of 325 pages a year. People asked why Bob did that, and one reason is that it was steady work," Moldoff says. "I knew that a script was going to be there every four or six weeks. Comics went through periods where good artists didn't have any work at all, but *Batman* was steady. I guess I traded my name for security."

Not long after he began working for Kane, he also started submitting work to National Periodical Publications—even though he was already on *Batman* at that time, he was an employee of Kane, not National. He began doing filler pages for National while also doing backgrounds and lettering for Kane; although most comics artists then aspired to draw newspaper strips, which carried more prestige and money, Moldoff says he enjoyed the opportunities that comic books presented. "I was really into comic books, although I was very young," he says. "It was a field which had just opened up. Before that, cartoonists who wanted a job would go to a newspaper or magazine and try to sell their artwork there. When comic books started, there was a whole new field to get into—a new opportunity."


YOUR SHIELD IS IN THE ROOM ABOVE THIS - IN FRONT OF THE MASTER'S OWN PRIVATE ROOM!
THAT'S THE GOOD BOY!
IF I ONCE LET THAT 'THOUGHT' GUY LOOK IN MY EYES, I'M A GONER. MY ONLY HOPE IS THAT SHIELD!
THE HAWKMAN ARRIVES AT THE ROOM...
SUDDENLY A GUARD ROUNDS ONE OF THE PASSAGEWAYS
THE HAWK TURNS AND DIVES AT THE GUARD...
THE HAWKMAN SLIPS A LEATHERN HANDCUFF OVER THE GUARD'S WRISTS
COME TO PAPA, BABY! I NEED YOU!!
NOW FOR THAT 'THOUGHT TERROR' AND BOY WILL HE BE SORRY TO SEE ME!

A long time ago, at a company far, far away, Sheldon Moldoff created legends that endured the tests of time.

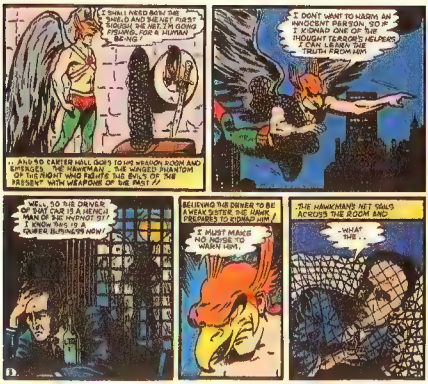
When Moldoff left Kane's studio, he first encountered the character that would make his name in the comics field—Hawkman. "Maybe six months after I started with Bob, I was offered other jobs," he says. "So, I left him and started working for Sheldon Mayer at All-American Comics, where I did a few strips. Then, M.C. Gaines, who was one of the pioneers of the comics industry, said, 'I want you to do this character, Hawkman.' Someone else had started it, but he wasn't happy with the art, and he told me to take it over and do what I wanted with it, which I did.

"I changed it quite a bit, and really fell into it with a lot of zeal. I was very interested in it, and following the styles of Alex Raymond, Hal Foster and Burne Hogarth, I wanted to learn how to draw. Being only around 18 at the time, I was lucky enough to be learning *while* I was drawing, selling my stuff. I did the best I could to make it as appealing as a newspaper strip, because at that time, strips were where you wanted to end up. Newspaper cartoonists were the thing, and comic books were a passing phase which none of us ever thought would turn into an industry."

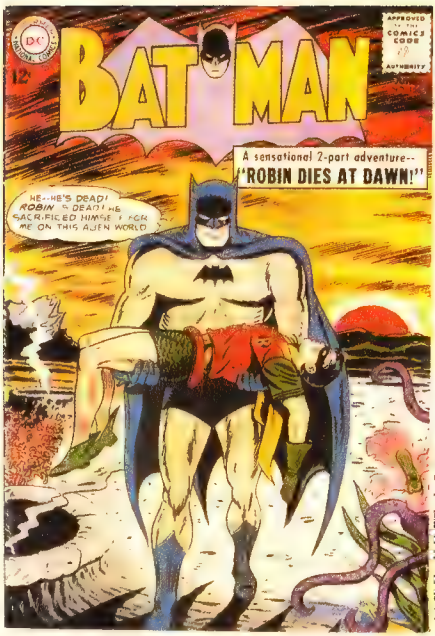
Moldoff can't recall the first Hawkman story that he worked on, though it

Flash Art: Trademark & Copyright 1940, 1968 DC Comics Inc.

"The idea of a cover was to make it exciting," says Moldoff. "They weren't much concerned with whether it had *anything* to do with the story inside."


I SHALL NEED BOTH THE SHIELD AND MY BEST FIRST THOUGH, THE NET. I'M DOING FRIEND, FOR A HUMAN BEING!
AND SO CARTER HALL GOES TO HIS WEAPON ROOM AND EMERGES AS THE WINGED PHANTOM OF THE RIGHT HAND FIGHTS THE EVILS OF THE PRESENT WITH WEAPONS OF THE PAST--
I DON'T WANT TO HARM AN INNOCENT PERSON, SO IF I KIDNAP ONE OF THE THOUGHT TERRORS HELPERS I CAN LEARN THE TRUTH FROM HIM
WELL, SO THE DRIVER OF THAT CAR IS A HENCH MAN OF THE HAWKMOST, EH? I KNOW THIS IS A QUEER BUSINESS NOW!
BELIEVING THE DRIVER TO BE A WEAK SISTER, THE HAWK PREPARES TO KIDNAP HIM
I MUST MAKE NO NOISE TO WAKEN HIM.
THE HAWKMAN'S NET SAILS ACROSS THE ROOM AND--
-WHAT THE..

Moldoff's deft hand brought a strikingly different look to the Golden Age Hawkman.


DC
12¢
BAT MAN
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
A sensational 2-part adventure--
"ROBIN DIES AT DAWN!"
HE--HE'S DEAD! ROBIN IS DEAD! HE SACRIFICED HIMSELF FOR ME ON THIS ALIEN WORLD
Design & Layout: Calvin Lee
Art: Sheldon Moldoff/Charles Paris

"Robin Dies at Dawn!" This legendary issue of *Batman*, from cover-to-cover drawn by Moldoff, began the oh-so-popular trend of killing off sidekicks.

was in *All-Flash* comics, but he remembers doing extensive cover work for some of their most prominent characters. "We alternated covers [on *All-Flash*]. There would be a Flash cover, then a Hawkman cover, and I did them both," Moldoff explains. "I did Flash covers, Hawkman covers, and I also did the Green Lantern cover for *All-American* #16, which introduced Green Lantern, as well as six or seven Green Lantern covers following that. It finally got to be a little too much work for me, and Sheldon Mayer decided that the other artists were capable of doing a cover, so they started doing their own covers.

"At that point in comic books, the idea of a cover was to make it exciting, so that the reader would buy it. They weren't much concerned with whether it had *anything* to do with the story inside. A couple of issues down the road, the editors changed their philosophy, and wanted the cover to be part of the story. Later on, of course, it turned into a field where pencillers stuck to pencilling, inkers to inking—if you were better at pencilling, that's where you ended up. It also expedited the work, because printing is a matter of deadlines. When comics started to sell, they couldn't get them out fast enough, and so the letterer was ready to do your pages as soon as you were done. It was mass production."

Art: Trademark & Copyright 1940, 1988 DC Comics Inc.

The Bearer of the Ring was also introduced to the world courtesy of a Moldoff cover. Green Lantern debuted in 1940.

Drawing a great many covers in DC's early years also allowed Moldoff to render a variety of the company's Golden Age heroes. "I did the Green Lantern, the Flash, the Hawkman. Later, I did *Moon Girl and the Prince* for M.C. Gaines. I could adapt to styles, that wasn't a problem—I think it was from teaching myself that I was able to do *Blackhawk*, *Sea Devils* and things like that. All the editor had to do was give me a magazine and say, 'This is what we want, and this is what it looks like,' and I could do it. Today, it's very different. You can't tell an artist, 'I want this *Batman* to look like Kane's *Batman*.' They don't do that—the artist has his own interpretation of *Batman*, period. You can pick up 12 comics with Batman and he's different in every book—sometimes he changes from page to page!"

Moldoff tried to bring a striking look to the Golden Age Hawkman. "From what fans tell me, the drawing *was* different," he says. "I had a lot of trouble with Sheldon Mayer at that time, because I would often consolidate two panels into one, so that I would have one major panel on a page. When I brought my pages in, he was furious, because I had deviated from his panels. He would say, 'If I *had* six panels on a page, I *want* six panels on a page,' and I would say, 'But it looks better with four.' That was the beginning of a little animosity between us. Editors are funny—if they work hard on something, they want it just so. I think that today, editors give you a little more leeway, and have a little more respect for the artists, but in those days, the editor's word was law."

Legendary comics scripter Gardner Fox wrote most of the early *Hawkman* stories, but Moldoff says they seldom worked closely together. "I picked up the scripts from Sheldon Mayer," says Moldoff. "The writer works with the editor, but I rarely worked with Gardner. I had an idea—I wanted to give Hawkman the Kingdom of the Birds. I spoke to Shelly Mayer and said

Detective
COMICS
12¢
JUNE
NO. 326
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
"DOUBLE BATMAN Vs. DR. DOUBLE X!"
DR. X IS BACK AGAIN WITH HIS MENACING ENERGY TWIN, DR. DOUBLE X.- BUT THIS TIME, THEY HAVE A DOUBLE BATMAN TO EQUAL THE ODDS!

Art: Sheldon Moldoff/Charles Paris

"When comic books started, there was a whole new field to get into—a new opportunity," recalls Moldoff of his beginnings.

Returning to contemporary comic-dom, Moldoff drew the cover to the debut issue of 1994's *Big Bang Comics*.

Art: Sheldon Moldoff/Courtesy Caliber Press

I had an idea—like Tarzan has the animals in the jungle, I want Hawkman to have all the birds of the sky at his command. Gardner thought it was a terrific idea, but Mayer never liked it. We were always limited as far as what we could do with the stories. I always felt that they could have been expanded greatly, but Mayer didn't like the idea.

"Gardner was an excellent writer, and very different from [longtime *Batman* scripter] Bill Finger. I think Bill was a better writer, more imaginative, but he couldn't turn it out on time like Gardner did. If you asked Gardner for a 10-page story by the end of the week, you had it. Bill was a different story—it was like pulling teeth. He wasn't that kind of a writer. He wasn't a workhorse—Fox was, and met his schedules. Bill Finger was talented, but beset by personal problems, maybe frustration over the success of Batman that he didn't share in—it was difficult for him to work, but he was a talented, talented guy."

Like most Golden Age artists, Moldoff says he never saved any of his pages, art that would be increasingly valuable in today's market, because it was perceived as worthless.

"We never saved artwork, because we never looked on it as being collectible," he says. "To us, it was just another story, another script—as soon as I get it done, I gotta have another one to pick up another check next week. Some of the artists—I don't know whether it was their ego or what—wanted a lot of their work back. And they went through the trouble of [driving to the printer and] getting it. I didn't ask for any of it back. It didn't interest me."

Moldoff's comics career was interrupted by the Army in 1944, and when he got out in 1946, he found it difficult to get his old job back at National. "Sheldon Mayer, who was still the editor, wouldn't give me back Hawkman or the Black Pirate, which I had created," says Moldoff. "He said he had other artists working, and a lot had happened in the last two years, and he just wasn't interested in working with me or giving me my old job back. So, I went to work for Fawcett and some other companies that didn't permit you to put your name on your work. I did *Captain Midnight*, *Don Winslow of the Navy*, *Tex Ritter*, and when romance came in, I did romance stories. When horror came in, I sold them a title: *This Magazine is Haunted*. I did the first nine or so covers of that magazine and an inside story. I sold them another horror magazine, *Worlds of Fear*."

Moldoff says that he actually produced the first horror comic for William Gaines, of E.C. and *Mad* fame, but lost it due to legal maneuvers and intimidation. "The historians say that Bill Gaines created the horror scene. I have a contract at home from Bill

Photo & Selected Art: Courtesy Sheldon Moldoff

"I don't think I will ever completely retire—I love to draw too much," states "Shelly" Moldoff. Imagine the comics world without these characters.

Gaines, because in 1948, I produced a horror book for him," says Moldoff. "He gave me a contract, and I was supposed to get a percentage. When I finished it—Johnny Craig did the cover and Gardner Fox wrote stories for it—he put it in a drawer and that's where it stayed. About eight months later, he came out with *Vault of Horror*, *Crypt of Terror* and his own magazines. I went down to see him, and said, 'Bill, I don't understand. We have a contract.' He said no, he didn't want to pay percentages, and there was nothing I could do about it because the contract wouldn't stand up.

"I made a trip to the lawyer who drew it up and asked him about the contract—I said, 'You drew it up, and now Bill tells me it's worthless.' I can remember like it was yesterday. He put his arm around me and said, 'Shelly, you're young. Pass it off to experience, but don't do anything about it, because we'll blackball you in the field.' Well, at age 24, this frightened me, that I would be blackballed in the field, so I didn't do anything. Eventually, I sold the title to Fawcett and they printed the magazine. That ran for quite a while, until Fawcett folded its tent and Charlton Comics ended up with all of Fawcett's titles."

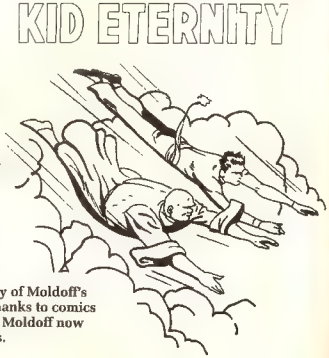
Although he didn't work for Charlton, Moldoff says he did draw titles like *The Black Terror* and *Commander Battle and the Atomic Sub* for Sanger Studios, until he ran into a former employer—who offered him a chance to do still more uncredited work. "In 1953, I met Bob Kane again," says Moldoff. "I hadn't seen him since the early '40s. He offered me the job as ghost. He said he needed an artist to pencil, so I took it. Of course, along with it, you kept your mouth shut, you didn't say anything. I did it for 15 years. I pencilled *Batman* from 1953 to 1967, thousands of pages, a hundred or so covers, and never said a word.

"Oddly enough, at the same time, I was working for DC Comics. I worked for Jack Schiff, the same editor who was handling *Batman*, doing *Mr. District Attorney*, *Justice League* and some *Superman* work with Curt Swan, inking many of his covers without credit. I'm credited now, in the books that come out, and I'm thankful to the comic book historians who wanted to know who drew what. My case was unique, because I did it for so long a time, so many pages, and Bob Kane got the credit."

A great many comics historians and Golden Age contemporaries of Kane (including one-time Kane assistant Jerry Robinson, creator of the Joker) feel that the late Bill Finger should share credit with Kane for Batman's creation. Even though some believe Kane has taken what may be undue credit for much of the Batman mythos, Moldoff says he holds no grudges. "Bob Kane would not give credit to anybody, including Bill Finger. Many people felt that Bill Finger wasn't given appropriate credit, but it was not Bob's nature to do it. I won't take anything away from Bob, because he *did* create *Batman*. He worked very hard at the beginning—he had a certain style which, although it wasn't great, told a story just the way he wanted it. And *Batman* became a smash. I say, don't fight success. The man put something into *Batman* which made it an outstanding success, and *Batman* and *Superman* founded the whole industry. I give him a lot of credit for that. Still, I always felt Bill's name should have been up there [next to Kane's as creator of *Batman*]. Even if Kane had said, 'I'm grateful to Shelly for helping me,' it wouldn't have hurt him. It would have made him a bigger person, but it wasn't in his nature to share any credits."

Despite his personal feelings, Moldoff said he never had trouble working for Kane's studio. "It wasn't difficult working with him, because I *didn't* work with him—I worked at home. When I finished a story, I brought it in. The only thing he ever watched closely was the covers. When I did a cover, it was usually at his apartment. I would go there, they would tell me what they wanted, and then I would do the cover. When I was finished, he would look at it, tell me it was fine, and that was it.

All Art: Sheldon Moldoff



The Golden Age saw many of Moldoff's creations blossom. And thanks to comics historians like Joe Desris, Moldoff now gets the credit he deserves.

All Flash, Batman, Robin, Green Lantern, Hawkman, Blackhawk, Penguin, Joker, Catwoman & Related Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1994 DC Comics Inc.

Moldoff has dabbled in animation, storyboarding and plotting *Courageous Cat and Minute Mouse* and producing *Marco Polo*, a full-length feature.

In the '50s, Moldoff drew the first Bat-Mite and Bat-Woman yarns.

BAT-MAN
IT'S BAT-MITE—BEHIND BAT-HIDING!
WITH YOUR HELP, BAT-HOUND, I'LL HUNT BATWOMAN THE MOST FAMOUS CRIME FIGHTER ON GOTHAM C.T.!

After the early years, Bob found it very difficult, like some other artists, to pick up a script and face an empty page. It's not easy, particularly after years of doing hundreds and hundreds, or even thousands, of pages, to sit down and start from scratch."

Moldoff explains that Kane was not closely involved while he was drawing *Batman* for Kane's studio. "I pencilled everything. He didn't have any involvement," he explains. "He looked at the pages, and he might make suggestions like, 'This should be a close-up,' but basically, I did everything. He gave me the script, I laid it out and created the characters that were called for.

"Many people along the way have asked, 'Who created this? Who created that?' I look at it this way. Creating a character like the Bat-Mite comes with the writer and the editor. They sit down, they hash out half a dozen plots at a time, and then the writer goes home and does the stories. Now, if the story calls for a Riddler, a Puzzler or Bat-Mite, then you have to figure out what he's going to look like. If you say the artist created him, it takes away from the writer who put him in the story in the first place. I drew the first Bat-Mite and the first Bat-Woman, but it was the writer and editor who called for such a character. So, *who* was the creator? It comes from the writer and then it's the artist's job to interpret what's in the script."

When Kane decided to turn *Batman* over to DC in 1967, his employees—including Moldoff—suddenly found themselves unemployed. "Bob made a deal with DC in which they were taking over everything, and he would get x amount of dollars," he says. "This was contrary to what he told me was going to happen. So, I woke up one morning and didn't have a job. I was a little bitter about the comics industry after that, and I went into animation. I had done animation before that—when Bob Kane sold *Courageous Cat and Minute Mouse*, I did the storyboards and the stories. I did 65 episodes of *Courageous Cat*, so I had the animation experience, know-how and talent, and I formed my own company to produce my own full-length animated feature called *Marco Polo*. It was eventually circulated all over the world, and it's being re-issued now, with scenes being changed and new storyboards."

For the last 10 years, Moldoff says he has also been doing children's comic books for Blockbuster, Red Lobster, Shonee's Restaurants, K-Mart and others. "You name it—I've done dozens of different things!" he laughs. "I don't think I will ever completely retire—I love to draw too much. I get the same satisfaction out of finishing a drawing, looking at it and seeing if I can do better, that I did 50 years ago."

Of the many characters and titles he drew over the decades, Moldoff is quick to name Hawkman as his favorite, with *Batman* a close second. "I was very proud to be doing *Batman*, because in my little family circle, Batman was so prestigious that my kids could say, 'My father does this.' There was a lot of pride in being connected with a strip of that size. Let's face it—*Batman* and *Superman* were the two biggest, and that was gratifying. It would have helped if my name was on some of them, but it didn't happen. But, thanks to historians like Joe Desris, I now get credit when DC reprints them. I don't think DC cares to delve too deeply into that part of comic book history, but I give these historians a lot of credit."

And today, the historians are giving Sheldon Moldoff credit—the credit that he was denied for many years. Looking at the crowds drawn to today's large comic conventions, Moldoff admits he's amazed by the fans' devotion. "They are *so* into comic books; comics are an integral part of their lives," he says. "And most of them are not new collectors—they've been collecting a long time, and they've been fans all of their lives. I could go to Austin, Texas, and a man who's just a little younger than me could come up to me and say, 'I remember when I was a kid, I couldn't wait for *The Flash* to come out.' It would surprise me, because being born and brought up in New York City, and working in New York City at that time—because that's where the publishers were—it never occurred to me that there were people in Wisconsin and Texas and Michigan and Missouri going to the store every month to buy comics. To me, the world was the end of the block where the newsstand was. I never thought, never *dreamed* that there were fans all over the country."

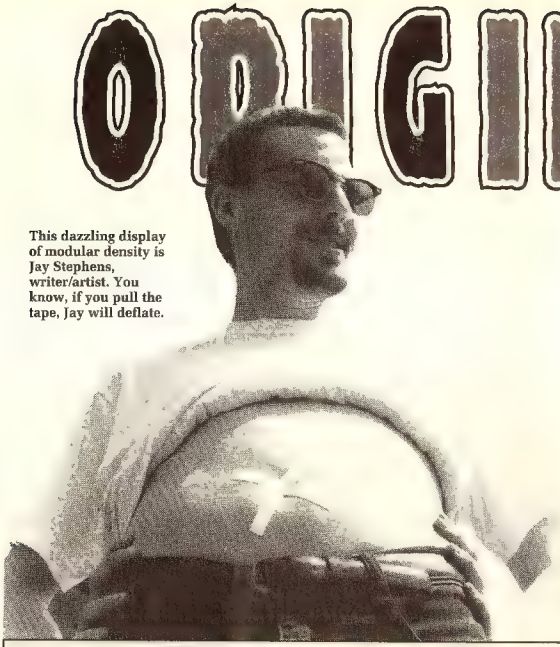
Detective
COMICS
12¢
BATMAN and ROBIN in The BRONZE MENACE!
"IN TOO LATE! BATMAN AND ROBIN ARE BEING TURNED INTO BRONZE STATUES!

Selected Batman Art: Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963 DC Comics Inc.

Moldoff's skilled hand couldn't turn lead to gold, but it could turn the Dynamic Duo into bronze.

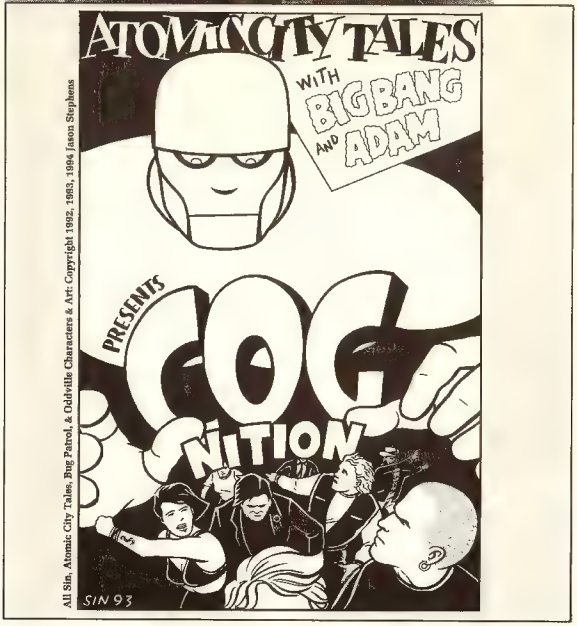
For Sheldon Moldoff, recognition for his work may have come late, but it's still very gratifying. "Much of this mystique about the Golden Age is nonsense," he says. "It was strictly a time when we were working hard at making a living. We had *no idea* at that time that it would eventually be called the Golden Age of Comics, or that comics would survive into the Silver Age, and then become the huge industry that it is today—I don't think anybody conceived that it would happen. But it's gratifying that these people appreciate it, come to a convention, meet me, shake my hand, tell me how much they admired me or loved the strip and say how happy they are that they finally got a chance to meet me. It floors me, it really does."

ORIGINAL



This dazzling display of modular density is Jay Stephens, writer/artist. You know, if you pull the tape, Jay will deflate.

According to Jay Stephens, superheroes should always make you—smile?



All Sin, Atomic City Tales, Bug Patrol, & Oddville Characters & Art: Copyright 1992, 1993, 1994 Jason Stephens

By DARCY SULLIVAN

The Maniac Gang are taking a break from conquering the world, and they're relaxing the way super-villains always do, watching TV and eating snacks. Skinman, his stitched-up face resembling a bruised baseball, glowers at *The Kids in the Hall*. Z-Girl pesters him, offering barbecue chips and asking him why he looks so glum.

"It must be really rough for you," she says, "trapped in the body of a lumbering monster and all! Being a repulsive freak can't be easy!"

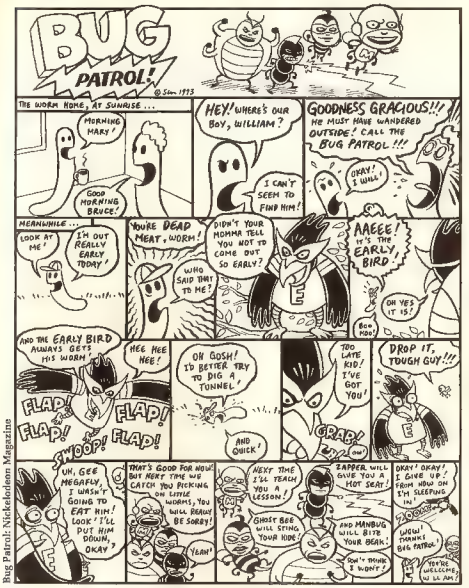
Sick of her psychoanalysis, Skinman snaps: "I was thinking about shopping...SHOPPING!"

The muscle folks talk this way a great deal in the comics of Jay Stephens. Like the time the Sinister Horde demanded that their leader, Mr. Dead, pick a new base for their nefarious operations. "Hey chief! Manhattan sucks the big one," yelled Captain Nasty. "The crime rate here is so high! There's too much competition!" hollered Malady, whose kiss means death. "We're always running into the

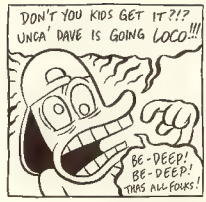
Stephens' newest venture into "comics with attitude" is *Atomic City Tales*, an old-fashioned superhero yarn *without* the old-fashioned superheroes.

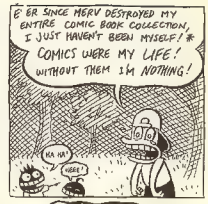
SIN

Stephens created Merv and Dave, Nod's postmodern disciples. "I took Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck and stripped them of any recognizable characteristics."

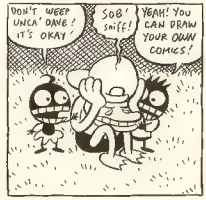

BUG PATROL!
© Sin 1993
THE WORM HOME, AT SUNRISE ...
MORNING MARY!
GOOD MORNING BRUCE!
HEY! WHERE'S OUR BOY, WILLIAM?
I CAN'T SEEM TO FIND HIM!
GOODNESS GRACIOUS!!! HE MUST HAVE WANDERED OUTSIDE! CALL THE BUG PATROL!!!
OKAY! I WILL!
MEANWHILE ...
LOOK AT ME!
I'M OUT REALLY EARLY TODAY!
YOU'RE DEAD MEAT, WORM!
WHO SAID THAT TO ME?
DIDN'T YOUR MOMMA TELL YOU NOT TO COME OUT SO EARLY?
AAEEE! IT'S THE EARLY BIRD
OH YES IT IS!
BOO! BOO!
AND THE EARLY BIRD ALWAYS GETS HIS WORM
HEE HEE HEE!
FLAP! FLAP! FLAP! FLAP!
OH GOSH! I'D BETTER TRY TO DIG A TUNNEL
AND QUICK!
TOO LATE KID! I'VE GOT YOU!
GRAB!
DROP IT, TOUGH GUY!!!
SPLAT!
WOOP!
UH, GEE MEGAFLY, I WASN'T GOING TO EAT HIM! LOOK! I'LL PUT HIM DOWN, OKAY?
THAT'S GOOD FOR NOW! BUT NEXT TIME WE CATCH YOU PICKING ON LITTLE WORMS, YOU WILL REALLY BE SORRY!
YEAH!
NEXT TIME I'LL TEACH YOU A LESSON!
GHOST BEE WILL STING YOUR HIDE!
ZAPPER WILL GIVE YOU A HOT SCARE!
AND MANBUG WILL BITE YOUR BEAK!
DON'T WORRY! I WON'T!
OKAY! OKAY! I GIVE UP! FROM NOW ON I'M SLEEPING IN!
WOW! THANKS BIG PATROL!
YOU'RE WELCOME U.U. AH!

Bug Patrol: Nickelodeon Magazines




E'ER SINCE MERV DESTROYED MY ENTIRE COMIC BOOK COLLECTION, I JUST HAVEN'T BEEN MYSELF! *
COMICS WERE MY LIFE! WITHOUT THEM I'M NOTHING!
HA HA!
WEE!

I TRIED GATHERING UP STUFF I HAD FOR A NEW COLLECTION. STAMPS, POP CANS, ANIMAL BONES, 3-D EXPLOITATION FILMS OF THE '60S AND '70'S. BUT IT'S NOT THE SAME THING!!!



All Art: Jason Stephens

Astonishers!" bellowed the Clot. "Whoa! My shoelace is untied!" croaked Necroman.

Obviously, Stephens' comics are *not* your standard superhero fare. They're alternative comics—but they don't exactly blend in there, either.

In fact, Stephens, a 23-year-old Canadian, could be place-kicked out of the Grouse 'n' Slouch Artiste Club for his *Atomic City Tales*, which debuts this summer. Alternative comics are supposed to be about the *pain of life*, man, not the pain of getting whupped by a nogoodnik named Teen Satan.

"All alternative comic book artists hate superheroes," Stephens says. "I think that's just cliquey, like all superhero artists hating alternative comics. It's stupid—how can you hate a whole genre?"

How indeed? Stephens himself has a foot in both camps. He produces hard-to-find black-and-white comics with print runs in the low thousands, like the hippest of the alternative crowd. But he admits to secretly liking *The Savage Dragon*. His fans, he says, overwhelmingly prefer his non-superhero stories—so, perversely, he's coming out with an all-superhero book, albeit a funny one. Rejecting the dictates of the mainstream and the independents, he's trying to show everybody that a few laughs and a little action can be a good thing.

"At first I felt really guilty about doing superheroes," he says. "But I *know* they can be fun."

Today, fun superheroes may be a dying breed, but they were all over the Golden Age and Silver Age. Of course, Stephens isn't old enough to remember much before the Disco Age. "I was a kid in the '70s," he says. "We had all the real crap superhero comics."

Only by haunting garage sales could he find the good stuff: comics by artists like Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Wally Wood and Alex Toth. It was at a garage sale that Stephens found a comic he mentions in reverently hushed tones.

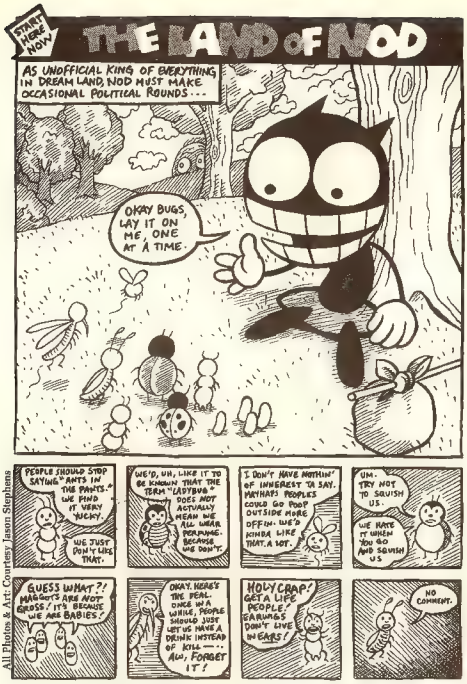
***Nickelodeon Magazine* hunted Stephens down and asked him to contribute a strip. Stephens answered that call to duty with—Bug Patrol!**

"My first *Doom Patrol* comic. Number 88. *Ohhh.* That was an eye-opener. The copy I got didn't even have a cover. I had no idea what the comic was or who the characters were. I just knew they were like the Fantastic Four, but *really weird*."

Stephens' *Atomic City Tales* mixes the retro feel of the best old comics with an off-kilter modern panache. Big Bang, the "hero" of *Atomic City Tales*, is an ordinary slacker named Felix (remember that name) who bopped a Tibetan drum and zoned in on the Primevibe, the rhythmic resonance from the creation of the universe itself. Suddenly, Felix's powers make Prime look like a pussy...willow.

"He can do anything," Stephens says. "But, he has a rather limited imagination, so he doesn't. In fact, he does some rather juvenile things."

Who says with great power comes great responsibility? Big Bang creates a supermod bachelor pad for himself, complete with robot bartenders and a private tattoo parlor. He plays ping pong in outer space with Darth Vader. When this gets boring, he forms the Astonishers, recruiting the Quirk, Green Torpedo, Atomic Girl and, in #4, Necroman (not the one from the Sinister Horde). *Youngblood* they ain't. "Big Bang would like it to be a superhero team," Stephens says, "but they just sorta hang out together."


START HERE NOW
THE LAND OF NOD
AS UNOFFICIAL KING OF EVERYTHING IN DREAM LAND, NOD MUST MAKE OCCASIONAL POLITICAL ROUNDS...
OKAY BUGS, LAY IT ON ME, ONE AT A TIME.
PEOPLE SHOULD STOP SAYING "ANTS IN THE PANTS" WE FIND IT VERY YUCKY.
WE JUST DON'T LIKE THAT.
WE'D, UH, LIKE IT TO BE KNOWN THAT THE TERM "LADYBUG" DOES NOT ACTUALLY MEAN WE ALL WEAR PERFUME. BECAUSE WE DON'T!
I DON'T HAVE NOTHIN' OF INNEREST TA SAY. MAYHAPS PEOPLES COULD GO POOP OUTSIDE MORE OFFEN. WE'D KINDA LIKE THAT A LOT.
UM. TRY NOT TO SQUISH US.
WE HATE IT WHEN YOU GO AND SQUISH US
GUESS WHAT?! MAGGOTS ARE NOT GROSS! IT'S BECAUSE WE ARE BABIES!
OKAY, HERE'S THE DEAL. ONCE WE WRITE, PEOPLE SHOULD JUST LET US HAVE A DRINK INSTEAD OF KILL---. AW, FORGET IT!
HOLY CRAP! GET A LIFE, PEOPLE. EARWIGS DON'T LIVE IN EARS!
NO COMMENT.

All Photos & Art: Courtesy Jason Stephens

ODDVILLE!
NO WAY VICTOR! WE ARE NOT CALLING THE BAND "VICTOR'S BAND"!
OH, YEAH.
OR "VICK AND THE TWITS"!
HUH!
WHAT?
DIDN'T YOU SEE THAT?!? A FLYING BABY!!!
WELL THAT EXPLAINS YOUR STUPID BAND NAMES! YOU'RE ON DRUGS!
I AM NOT!
AAA!
THERE IT GOES AGAIN!
HOLD ME DUDLEY! I HAVE THE CREEPS!
YOU KNOW, "THE CREEPS" IS A PRETTY GOOD BAND NAME. SIN

Stephens' odd brand of humor has even managed to corrupt the minds of consenting adults in bi-weekly outlets in Seattle and Albuquerque.

World, meet Nod. Nod, the world.

Oh, there are fights. "In the first issue," Stephens reveals, "Big Bang and the Maniac Gang fight over a parking space." Later in that issue, Felix loses half his powers when Doc Phantom blasts him in the face. Reminder: Don't take cuts on Doc Phantom.

Stephens acknowledges his debt to such independent books as *Mr. Monster*, *Megaton Man* and *Flaming Carrot*, which in the 1980s made the world safe for super-silliness. To set his book apart, he has seasoned the camp with Generation X trendiness. As soon as Felix reveals his zippy new powers, one of his friends says, "You could make our band famous!"

And, in a joking nod to autobiographical comics like *Peep Show*, Stephens has added a character at least as peculiar as Big Bang, Mr. Monster or the carrot that walks like a man: Jay Stephens. The artist/writer himself pals around with Felix and company. The Astonishers even take their name from one of the comics on which Stephens works.

"It's another attempt to make my comic different," Stephens says. "Michael T. Gilbert isn't in *Mr. Monster*. Bob Burden isn't in *Flaming Carrot*. Mike Allred isn't in *Madman*. I like the way Stan Lee and Jack Kirby would put themselves in *Fantastic Four* stories—Dr. Doom even held them hostage once."

Allred's *Madman*, now published by Dark Horse, still seems pretty darn close in spirit to Stephens' stuff. "I'm worried about that," Stephens admits. "When I saw his comics, I thought, 'That bastard—he's doing exactly what I'm trying to do, that pop culture mishmash.'

"I actually sent him some of my work and talked to him on the phone. He was very encouraging. It turns out we have many of the same influences, and we're sort of accidentally working in the same vein.

"*Atomic City Tales* is gonna be a lot more manic," says Stephens of his attempts to keep from crowding Allred. "It'll be crazier, less believable than Madman. And there's a lot of philosophy in Allred's work. He really goes for that religious/spiritual stuff. There's no undertone to my work—it's just *fun*."

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X5 "THUNDER ROLLS"-GARTH
B22 "LIKE A VIRGIN"-MADONNA
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E10 "RICO SUAVE"-GERARDO
Z1 "BAD"
OPERATING THIS THING ISN'T AS EASY AS IT LOOKS, YOU KNOW.
BUT...!

"One of the reasons I'm doing *Atomic City Tales* is that it's painful for me to know that the corner store has the *Punisher*," says Stephens.

Kooky they may be, but Big Bang, the Maniac Gang and the Astonishers are far from Stephens' freakiest characters. For the real nuts in the mix, you have to look at *Sin*, Stephens' first comic book, which followed his work in the Xerox-and-staple world of mini-comics. (*Sin* took its name from the second half of Stephens' full first name, Jason; Stephens also signs his work Sin.)

Design & Layout: Calvin Lee

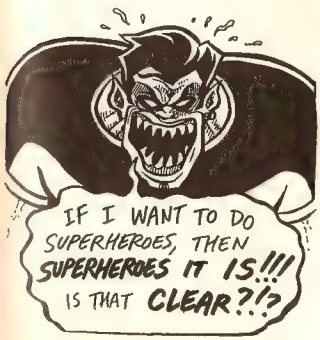
And you have to come to terms with Nod. Nod is a bug-eyed creature with a somewhat mystical authority and an origin story to die for. "I hallucinated a character similar to Felix the Cat once, when I stayed awake for way too long," Stephens explains. "This was during my experimental teen stage. I was at my friend Dave's house, and we decided, 'Hey, let's stay awake for two days!' On the evening of the second day, Dave was asleep and I was in the kitchen having another cup of coffee."

Enter Felix. "It ran into the room and under a table," Stephens recalls. "If you can imagine a black-and-white Max Fleischer cartoon in 3-D, that's what it looked like. It scared the hell out of me!

"Because Nod was based on a real experience, he's more real to me than the other characters," Stephens says. "In the beginning, I didn't feel capable of writing Nod well enough to do him justice. I didn't want to ruin him, so I played him down." In fact, Nod disappeared from *Sin* after #1. In *Sin* #5, the other *Sin*ners mounted a search party, but all they found were a passel of evil-smelling Yeti.

Nod's main disciples, Merv and Dave, similarly recall cartoons Stephens loved as a kid. "They're kind of postmodern," Stephens explains. "I took Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck and stripped them of any recognizable characteristics." Well, Merv's pants are still a giveaway, but it's true that you can't even tell what animals they're supposed to be. According to Stephens, they're not *any* specific animals, neither are Nod (though Stephens' printer once called him a cat) or Captain Rightful (a kind of snake with legs).

This genus-free menagerie set *Sin* apart from the independent comics it rubbed spines with on the shelves—as Stephens puts it, "*Sin* wasn't exactly 'cool.' " For one thing, the comedy revolved around the characters' love for particularly cheesy comics. Merv and Dave once mounted a commando-style



raid against Fascinating Komics Incorporated when they thought the *Sinister Horde* comic was getting too moody.

Stephens roamed through *Sin* too, usually in the guise of the cranky Badman, who holed up in the Hall of Brooding. "I actually have a Badman costume," Stephens announces. "I made it for Halloween in 1991. It looks like it does in the comic, except a lot messier, and I look *really stupid* in it."

Sin ran for five issues from 1992 until 1993, when Stephens left the book's floundering publisher, Tragedy Strikes Press. The wages of *Sin* had been godawful by mainstream standards—around $20 a page. But due to TSP's financial troubles, Stephens wasn't paid for the last two issues.

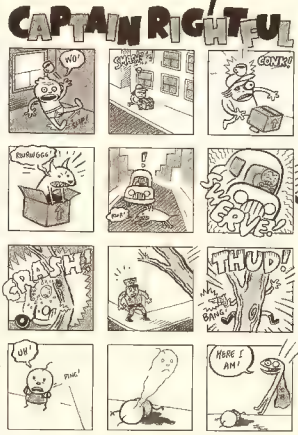
"I almost completed #6," he says. "I could have done it, but it would have been for free." Too bad—it was a humdinger. "Almost everyone dies in it." This lost issue may someday see print as part of a *Sin* collection, Stephens says.

During the hiatus following *Sin*'s swan song, Stephens landed a color strip in a national children's magazine, *Nickelodeon*. Senior Editor Anne Bernstein sought him out.

It's perfectly clear that Stephens will do whatever he wants. "At first, I felt guilty about doing superheroes, but I know they can be fun."

Stephens' comic appreciation came not with the Golden Age or the Silver Age, but with the Disco Age. "We had all the real *crap* superhero comics."

Even early in Stephens' comics career, the signs of a clearly...special mind at work are evident, and somebody let him experiment in *Sin*.



Stephens, though, says he felt guilty about working for the company that had nudged John Kricfalusi and his Spumco company off the animated TV series *Ren and Stimpy*, which Kricfalusi had created. "I wrote Kricfalusi a letter," Stephens says, "saying I thought he got royally screwed and I wanted to apologize for working for the same people. He wrote back and said, 'Don't sweat it, man.' "

Nickelodeon runs Stephens' *Bug Patrol* strip, which has Stephens' trademark humor (super-powered bugs!) but without the cussing. *Nickelodeon* is for kids, and the editors take this charter very seriously. Stephens offers an example: "One time I had the Bug Patrol threatening somebody, like 'Don't do that again or we'll beat you up.' They asked me to tone it down."

In his post-*Sin* period, Stephens also responded to an ad asking for writers and hooked up with Atlantis Films in Toronto, which is producing a show called *Squawk Box* for Canadian television. Stephens describes the half-hour show for teens, scheduled to debut this fall, as "*Kids in the Hall* meets *Liquid TV*." He's writing a recurring segment called Wonderduds, about "a superhero who never really does anything." Wonderduds will feature computer animation from Toronto's Calibre Digital Design, based on Stephens' character designs.

It sounds like Stephens was mighty busy in 1993, but he yearned for his own comic again. When Michel Vrana, an editor from Tragedy Strikes Press, formed his own company, Black Eye Productions, Stephens signed on fast. One of Black Eye's first publications, *Sputnik* #1, featured the debut appearance of the Maniac Gang.

(continued on page 60)

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Radomski

(continued from page 39)

that's easy. How basic can you get?' But it's not that easy. It's a cultural thing. It needs some explaining. They're used to having stories told to them the way they do, as much as we have," Radomski says.

Warner Bros. wanted to follow *Batman*'s first season with a direct-to-video feature, *Mask of the Phantasm*, which Radomski says was basically "an expanded episode. We boarded the script and did all of our designs and shipped it overseas. We were treating it with more quality, but we originally didn't intend for it to be on the big screen."

Spectrum in Japan did the layout and key animation; Dong Yang did the rest. Then, Warners called and announced the switch to the big screen—which meant the visuals had to be re-jiggered to accommodate widescreen theatrical aspect ratio.

Other hurdles included the time factor. From start to finish, the movie had to be completed in eight months to meet the December 25 release date. Although the budget was increased to around $6 million, the studios had to pool their resources to give better-quality animation for the big screen.

"We weren't working with seasoned veteran animators from Don Bluth's studios or Disney," Radomski points out. "These guys were good, but they hadn't done too much feature work for the States. They really rose to the occasion. All things considered, it's a really good film."

On the other hand, Radomski says, "I don't want to set a precedent that a film of this quality could be done in this amount of time. It's not fair to us or to the product. You put a studio through the wringer, and you go, 'How can I criticize what they did, because they got it done in this amount of time and it looks fine.' We're really proud of what we did." *Mask of the Phantasm*, in its May video release, will be refined from the movie version with a thousand feet of retakes.

For Eric Radomski, the fascination with animation is that "it's completely fabricated from nothing. It comes from a pencil and paper and by the time you get to the final product with the sound FX and music, people think it's *real*.

"That's the biggest plus in doing this kind of work," he says. "If you can really make that happen for people, you know you're doing something right. If you can really buy into it or be moved by it or somehow it affects you, that's great. That's the biggest compliment that anybody can give someone making animated films. I'm glad to hear compliments like that." CS

Stephens

(continued from page 59)

Thanks to Black Eye, *Sin* came back in January 1994 with a new and improved #1. Merv celebrated by peeing all over Dave's comics and then setting them on fire. Things were back to normal.

Or were they? (Cue spooky music.) Because with the very next issue, *Sin* folded again.

This time, blame Stephens. He had decided to concentrate on the Big Bang saga he launched in the new *Sin* #1. Nod and his pals may show up later in their own title, but for now it's action time.

"There's a growing trend in alternative comics toward longer stories," says Vrana. "It's an important way for younger cartoonists like Jay to stretch themselves. And rather than having two sides to his book—one crazy and funny, one straighter—Jay's going to do it all in one storyline and be fun and crazy with the *Atomic City Tales* characters." Vrana also says Stephens will be broadening his audience—unlike *Sin*, *Atomic City Tales* probably won't carry a "For Mature Readers" tag. (Stephens calls his new comic "borderline mature.")

Expect a humor/horror/romance/action book, incorporating comics influences from the Avengers to the Archies. That's right, the Archies. Sneer if you must, but the Riverdale High gang are now *tres chic*, having influenced comics such as *Love and Rockets*, the standard-bearer for independent comics.

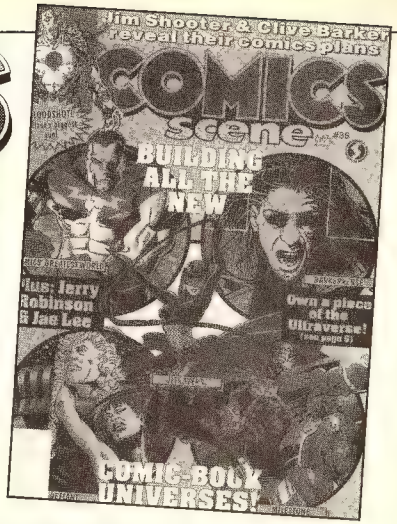
"There's a lot of Archie Comics in *Atomic City Tales*," Stephens says. "When I was a kid, I thought the Archies were neat, because they seemed really real." Stephens laughs, scarcely able to believe what he's saying. "I thought, 'This is how *real* people are.' "

So if you can imagine a nuclear-powered Jughead double-dating with the Hulk and beating up an all-ghoul grunge group, you're halfway to Atomic City. Be prepared to have some fun when you get there—because if there's one thing Jay Stephens can't stand, it's a sour superhero.

"One of the reasons I'm doing *Atomic City Tales* is that it's painful for me to know that the corner store closest to me has an issue of the *Punisher*—no bright colors, bullets flying everywhere and a high body count. It's so bleak and depressing, it makes me glad I grew up in the '70s.

"Superheroes *aren't* serious. People should stop trying to make them so real. The whole charm of them is that they're *not* real. There don't have to be guns—it's fantasy. You can make fun things happen." CS

COMICS scene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Ryan

(continued from page 31)

said, 'Oh yeah, well, *I* just met *Marie Severin!*' "

It would be many years, though, before Ryan joined the crew at Marvel. Ryan ponders what he would have done differently on his first visit to Marvel. "I went to the office unprepared. They asked if I had samples of my artwork. I didn't. I told them I could draw something for them. I didn't ask the right questions. Many things, over the years, got in the way. It wasn't until I was forced into making a career choice that I took the jump."

Besides Lee and Kirby, Ryan cites Gil Kane, Curt Swan, Neal Adams and John Byrne as influences.

Now an established professional looking back on his career, Ryan notes, "Five years ago, I had no idea I would be on *Fantastic Four*. Byrne used to refer to himself as one of the guys in the trenches. We're always there, and we always get the job done. Editors really appreciate that. If there's any advice I could give to anyone trying to break into the business, it is to get your first job in, as best you can, and *on time*! I can't tell you how many times I've talked to editors who can't find the artist who's working on a particular story for them, and the story is late."

Ryan looks forward to many years at Marvel. He would love to work on *Captain America*, *Thor* and (if it ever happens) a Superman/Fantastic Four cross-over. "But, I'm very happy where I am right now. I would love to do *Superman* once or twice, but *Fantastic Four* is where I wanted to be, and I'm here now. Five years from now, I hope to *still* be on the *Fantastic Four*," Paul Ryan says. "I love the book, and I promised Tom DeFalco that I would stay on it with him in excess of the run that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby did. That means we've got to do 102 issues, and we're only on 31 now!"

Star Slammers

(continued from page 43)

that were floating around for quite a while and took time to complete," he says. "Coming out in June is an *Iron Man 2020* story in the Prestige format. Originally, it was going to be a graphic novel, but Marvel doesn't publish graphic novels anymore. I've written a 64-page story that Bob Wiacek is pencilling and inking. I have a story coming up for Topps that I'm going to be writing for Mark Chiarello to paint. I'm a big Mark Chiarello fan, and one of the principal reasons for doing the job is that Mark is so darned good that it'll be a pleasure to work with him.

"And I'll be working on *Star Slammers* through the summer, but haven't thought about my next project. I've had several offers, and it's possible I may be able to do a long story in several chapters that Weezie [wife Louise Simonson] would write and I would draw for the Malibu Ultraverse. I'm hoping we'll be able to work that out, because I would like to work with her as my writer again—I really enjoy working with her. Beyond that, I have several other creator-owned projects that I would like to do, and I have some more *Star Slammers* tales to tell."

With high hopes for the future of the Star Slammers, Simonson would be delighted to continue the series. "Depending on the reception that *Star Slammers* gets—if it does well enough and nobody loses any money on it—I might just stay with the Slammers for a while and do other story arcs, possibly with the same character, possibly with different characters. I'm not really sure. Commercially, it would probably be wise to stay with the same guy, but I have this vision of stuff over time that I would like to do as well."

During his many years in comics, Walt Simonson has written or drawn titles including *The Fantastic Four* (CS #8), *Thor*, *ALIEN*, *RoboCop vs. Terminator* (CS #30), *Cyberforce*, *X-Factor*, *Manhunter*, *The Avengers*, *Jurassic Park* and many other series. He admits he has been lucky enough to work on just about every title he has ever wanted to do.

"When I was reading comics," he says, "there were several Marvel characters that were favorites, Thor being the preeminent example. I had the chance to do *Thor* a couple of times, so I don't think there really are any characters at this time that I would say, 'Gee, I would die to be able to do that character!'

"I've worked on virtually all the characters I really like. I'm more interested in working with other *creators* now, rather than the characters, and that interest guides my steps."

Armorines

(continued from page 25)

"On *X-O*, I'm working with Rik Levins and Kathryn Bolinger, and they're both doing a fantastic job. It's funny—the way I write seems to change depending on the artistic team, maybe because each group takes my work in a different direction. And it's always different from the inner vision I had while writing it, which is very cool. Jim [Calafiore] does that in *Armorines*. He always has ideas about new things to add; he contributes a lot to this book, giving it a harder edge than there is in *X-O*.

"While I'm talking about artists, I want to say that Eric Lusk [*Armorines*] and Andrew Covalt [*X-O*] are doing great work coloring these books. They add a great deal to the way the work comes out and I'd like to make sure they aren't overlooked."

Gonzalez admits that it's very gratifying, although a bit strange, to be writing *X-O*, since he started on the book as the original colorist. "I was hired after going to the Joe Kubert School for two years," he says. "A friend of mine, Jose Delbo, knew Don Perlin and he told me that Valiant might be hiring. I said 'Who?' At that point, the company was so new—I think *Magnus* had shipped three issues, but there was no track record or anything to look at. I went up with a friend and we both got hired as part of the original Knob Row—I was one of the first Knobs!—doing coloring and some backgrounds. Now, I look at my portfolio from those days and I wonder, 'Why on Earth did they hire us?' I remember working on *Solar* #1, and now here we are."

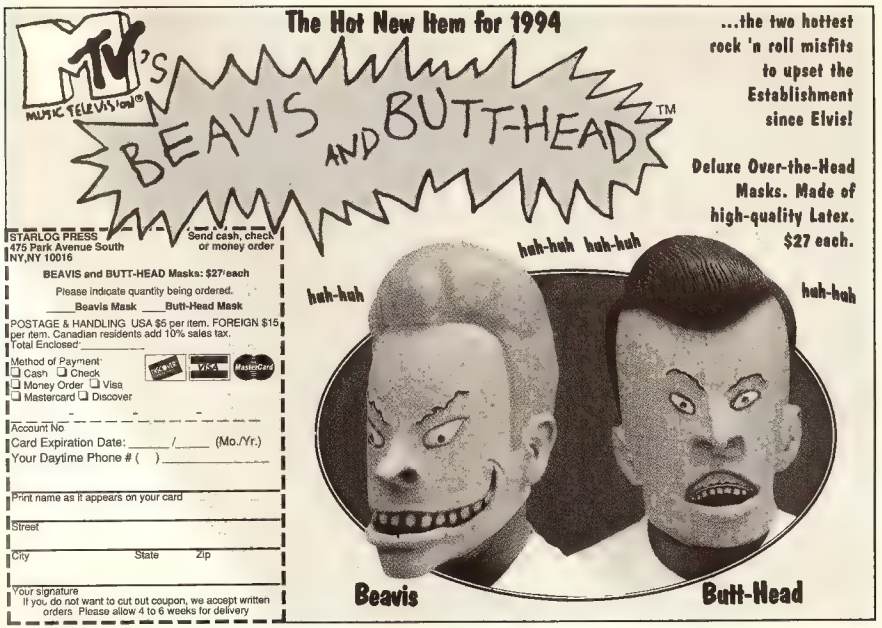
He's grateful to Bob Layton for giving him the chance to try something completely new: writing. "I had been on *X-O* as colorist since issue #1, and I harassed Bob to let me do a *Shadowman* fill-in, just to see if I could do it. Then, I did an *X-O* fill-in...only Bob came to me and said that their plans for a new writer hadn't worked out, and would I like to take over the book? It was a real break for me. I worked my ass off after that, to get where I am now; I feel I was lucky, but I *did* pay my dues. And that's the combination I think people need to get ahead, in this business or anywhere—to take the opportunities you get and then work hard to make them pay off for you. Learn as much as you can, look for your breaks, and make the most of them. I see people here who could have done anything, but they squandered their chances. Now, I've dropped coloring altogether to write *Armorines*."

Besides writing for Valiant, Gonzalez also edits both *Bloodshot* and *Solar*. He says that editing requires a completely different mindset from his other tasks.

"Having been a colorist—an underappreciated profession—and now a writer, I have got a pretty set approach to doing those things," he says. "Being an editor, I have to look at the plots and scripts I get as somebody else's work and not try to impose my own attitudes on them. It isn't me creating this stuff, in these two books, it's me putting things together. It's very different, and it took me a while to get used to it. I'm learning something new about editing every day.

"Most of it is learning about people. Everyone has their own way of approaching things. Some people are inflexible about their work—it's always 'Take it or leave it.' Those guys don't usually last too long. I would rather work with someone who can listen to criticism without automatically shutting it out behind his pride. I hope I treat people with respect."

Now, in thinking of the Armorines, Jorge Gonzalez says, "I remember sitting at my kitchen table at 3 a.m. trying to come up with ideas for who these guys were. And I've seen those ideas turn into real characters. It's really weird, but I love it!"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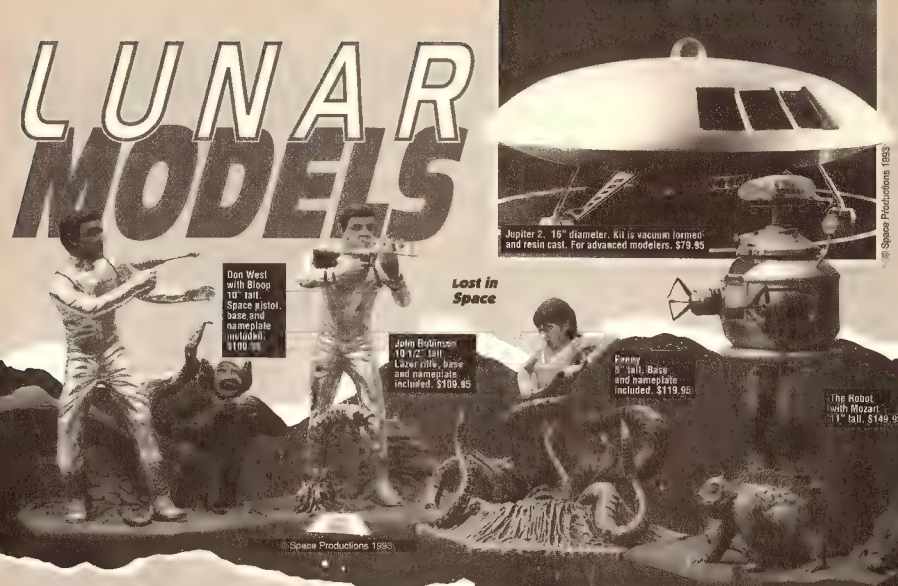
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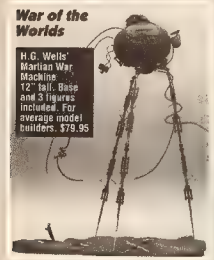

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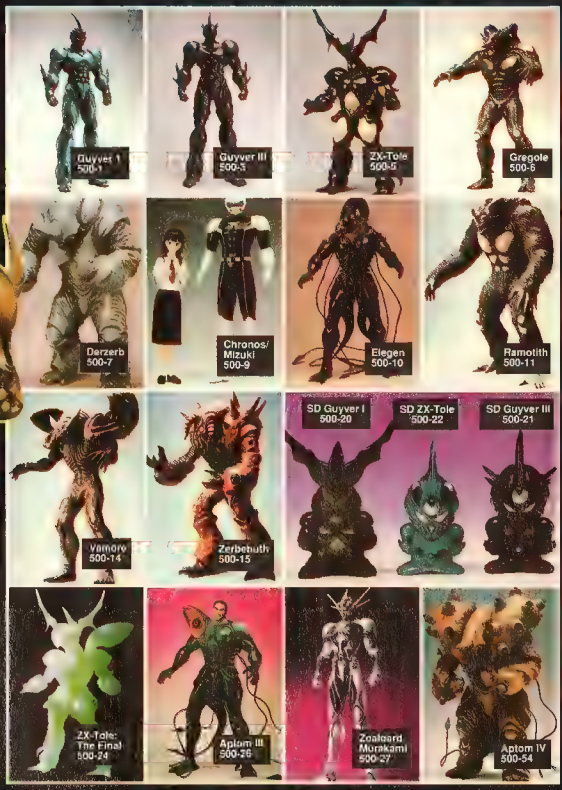

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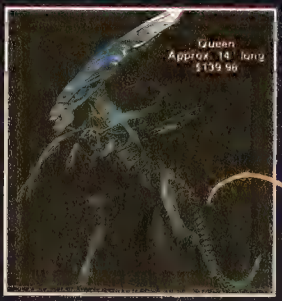
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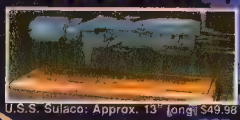
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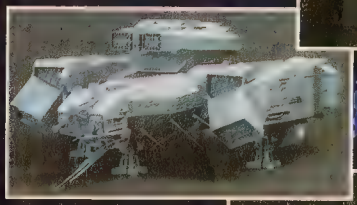
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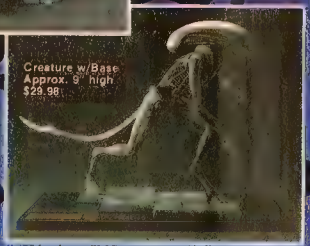
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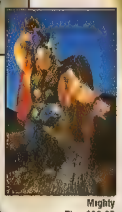

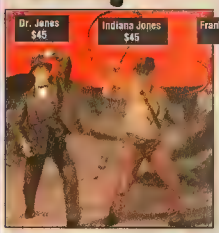

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C-3PO shown about 24" tall
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Terry Art: Milton Caniff/Copyright 1945 News Syndicate Inc.

Milton Caniff's classic *Terry & the Pirates* is in development as a syndicated TV series.

All of these upcoming projects are live-action unless specified. Those boxed are new or updated since last listing. **Not everything listed will ultimately ever be made.** S: script; D: director; P: producer; EP: executive producer; C: creator; AN: animated; LA: live-action; Syn: syndicated; HB: Hanna-Barbera; Nel: Nelvana; WD: Disney; WB: Warner Bros.; PP: Paramount; U: Universal; Col: Columbia; Am: Amblin; DH: Dark Horse; L: Largo; QDE: Quincy Davis Entertainment. **Attn. all pros:** Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016. (Info as of 3/7/94)

❑ **The Airtight Garage.** AN. EP: Kurosawa Ent. P: Philippe Rivier. D: Moebius, Katsuhiro Otomo. S: Randy Lofficier.

❑ **Aladdin.** AN series & video sequel. (see page 6)

Alfred E. Neuman. Film. P: Steven Haft, QDE.

Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov, S. Daniel.

Annie. Film. Rastar.

Archie. LA film. DIC.

❑ **The Badger.** Film/TV. PP.

Barbarella. LA film. Nel.

Baby Huey. AN. Syn TV. Harvey via Claster TV. For fall.

❑ **Batman III.** Sequel. D: Joel Schumacher. S: Lee & Janet Batchler. Shoots Sept.

Betty Boop. AN film. S: Jerry Rees. EP: R. Fleischer, R. Zanuck.

Black Panther. Film. W/Wesley Snipes. Sony.

Blade. Film.

Blankman. Film. W/ Damon Wayans. D: Mike Binder. Sony. Summer release.

Blondie. Film. WB.

❑ **Broom Hilda.** Film. P: Ernest Chambers.

Casper. Film. Am/U. D: Brad Silberling. S: Sherri Stoner, Deanna Oliver. W/ C. Ricci.

Catwoman. Film. WB. S: Dan Waters.

Charlie Chan. D: M. Mann.

Concrete. Film. DH. S: Larry Wilson, Paul Chadwick.

❑ **The Crow.** Film. Miramax. Out May.

Crying Freeman. Film. D: C. Gans. P: Brian Yuzna.

Deadworld. Film. S: Mark Pavia (D), Jack O'Donnell (P).

Dr. Strange. Film. Savoy.

Doom's IV. Film. P/S: Rob Liefeld. Am.

Double Dragon. Film.

Duckman. AN series. USA.

Dudley Do-Right. Film. U.

Elektra Assassin. Film.

❑ **Fantastic Four.** AN series. Genesis Ent.

Fat Albert. LA film. P: Bill Cosby.

Faust. Film. D: Stuart Gordon. S: David Quinn.

❑ **Felix the Cat.** AN. Film Roman.

Flaming Carrot. Film.

The Flintstones. Film. U/Am. D: Brian Levant. May.

Ghost Rider. Film.

❑ **G.I. Joe.** Film. P: Larry Kasanoff.

The Green Hornet. Film. S: Chuck Pfarrer. U.

Hate. Film. S: Peter Bagge. Colossal Pictures.

Incredible Hulk. Film. U.

Inspector Gadget. LA film. S: J. Loeb III, M. Weisman. U.

❑ **Iron Man.** AN series. Genesis Ent.

Judge Dredd. Film. Sylvester Stallone. S: Bill Wisher. D: Danny Cannon. Shoots in June.

Kull. Film. U. S: C. Pogue.

❑ **Li'l Abner.** Film. P: Ernest Chambers.

Lt. Blueberry. Film. P: Eclectic Films.

The Lion King. AN film. WD.

The Mask. Film. New Line. S/D: Chuck Russell. August.

❑**Mega Man.** AN series. Ruby-Spears.

The Men in Black. Film. Col. P: W. Parkes, L. McDonald.

Mr. Magoo. Film. Am/WB.

That friendly ghost Casper will materialize again on movie screens. A live-action film is now shooting.

Pagemaster. AN/LA film. D: Joe Johnston. Fox/HB. X-Mas.

Peanuts. LA film. P/S: John Hughes. WB.

❑ **The Phantom.** Film. PP. AN series. *Phantom 2040.* Hearst Ent. Voices: Scott Valentine, Margot Kidder, Mark Hamill, Ron Perlman. Debuts fall.

Plastic Man. Film. WB/Am. S: L. Wilso D: Bryan Spicer.

Pocahontas. AN film. WD.

Prince Valiant. LA film. S: M. Beckner, Roger Kumble, Marlene King. N. Constantin.

The Pulse. Film. C: Todd McFarlane. QDE.

Reid Fleming. Film. WB.

❑ **Richie Rich.** Film. P: J. Silver, J. Davis. D: Don Petrie. W/ Macaulay Culkin, John Cleese.

The Saint. Film. PP.

Sandman. Film.

Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver. S/D: John Milius. WB.

The Shadow. Film. W/Alec Baldwin. July.

Sheena. TV series. P: Paul Aratow. Col.

❑ **The Simpsons.** AN series. Renewed for 72 *more* episodes.

Sin City. S: Frank Miller.

Spawn. Film.

Speed Racer. Film. D: Patrick Read Johnson. S: J.F. Lawton. WB.

Spider-Man. AN TV mini-series. Fox. Daily TV series later. LA film. S: Jim Cameron (D), Neil Ruttenberg. Summer '95.

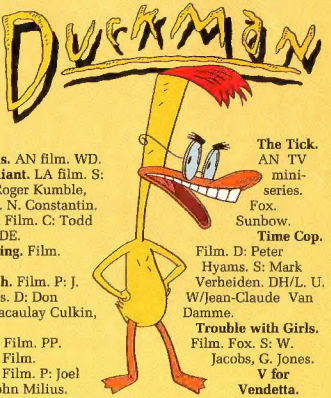
Spy vs. Spy. Film. S: Gene Quintano. P: Steven Tisch, QDE.

Stealth Force. Film. Kandoo.

Superman. TV series. ABC.

❑ **Tank Girl.** Film. D: Rachel Talay. S: Tedi Sarafian. P: Trilogy Ent. UA.

❑ **Terry & the Pirates.** TV series. 22 episodes. P: Ben Melniker, Michael Uslan, Robert Rehme, Mace Neufeld, RSC Films.



***Duckman* now solves cartoon crimes on the USA Network.**

Duckman Art: Copyright 1994 Paramount Pictures

The Tick. AN TV mini-series. Fox. Sunbow.

Time Cop. Film. D: Peter Hyams. S: Mark Verheiden. DH/L. U. W/Jean-Claude Van Damme.

Trouble with Girls. Film. Fox. S: W. Jacobs, G. Jones.

V for Vendetta. Film. S: Hillary Henkin. D: Brett Leonard. P: Joel Silver.

Virus. Film. S: Chuck Pfarrer. P: Gale Anne Hurd. U.

Wonder Woman. AN TV.

❑ **X-Men.** LA film. Fox. P: Lauren Shuler-Donner. S: Andrew Kevin Walker.

❑ **Youngblood.** AN series. Direct-to-video. Roustabout Prod.

Zen. Film. AN series.

❑ **Zorro.** Film. S: Kathleen King. D: Mikael Salomon. TriStar. Shoots April. AN TV series. Imagination F. Calico.

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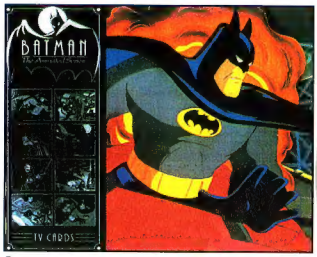

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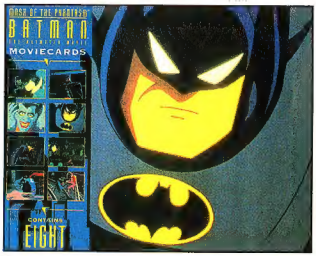

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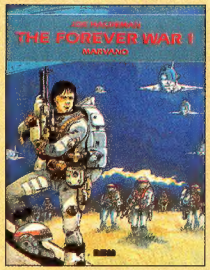

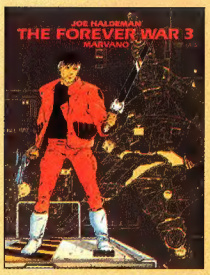

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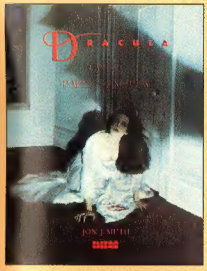

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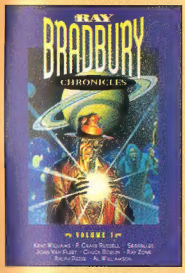

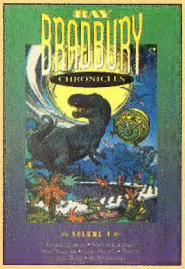

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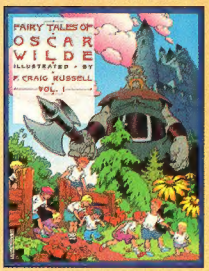

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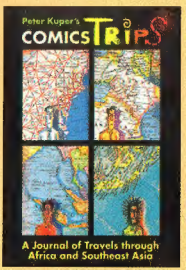

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